

From James Sacco

I understand that Binghamton now has 2 in person days /week. We of course remain at 1. I believe that this makes us THE MOST RESTRICTIVE DISTRICT IN THE AREA. Consider: Windsor's FB page has a photo of 13 kids in a single class, shoulder-to-shoulder, during a visit from a firefighter. I further understand that their masking requirement is more common sense than Vestal's OCD approach. In stark contrast, a photo from a recent Vestal newsletter had to be photoshopped because there is no meaningful activity in our schools.

I once again have to ask "why?". every time you have answered such a question, it has been deliberately obfuscatory: you refer me to your FAQs, repeat the mantra that it's about "health and safety" and make a conclusory allusion to CDC guidelines. There are no CDC guidelines requiring only 1 in person day per week. your FAQs provide no algorithm as to why we have been at "Phase 2" since September 14 and when we might move to Phase 3 or beyond; there is no indication that any metric is being reviewed. At this point, it is tragically clear that there is no algorithm, there are no metrics, there is no calculating; it is about the advancement of a dystopian political agenda. there is no intention to return to normalcy or anything close.

What, precisely, do you claim our children are being "kept safe" from? Your regular announcements and the district dashboard speak only of "cases" -- not fatalities, not hospitalizations, not even symptomology, but only "cases". Far from justifying this infernal lockdown, it rather supports a full reopening: if we have positive tests but no symptomology (let alone hospitalizations or fatalities), then the risk you claim to be avoiding is illusory particularly where, as here, parents maintain the option of keeping their children home if they so choose. Nor has any consideration been given to the adverse impact of this dreadful "hybrid system": it is a grossly inferior methodology of teaching, 4 days a week in front of a computer is tortuous and the one day a week in school is eerie given the dearth of people in the schools; it is not a pleasant experience for students.

I strongly object to what you are subjecting these children (and, by extension parents) to and implore you to jettison your political goals and resume educating our children.

-- Jim Sacco

The decision to move through the phases is based on health and safety criteria and benchmarks. During the Board meeting Tuesday November 17, 2020, the Superintendent reviewed the matrix for moving from one Phase to another. One important factor is staffing levels. The transportation and facilities departments are areas of concern when staff are not available; it affects the disinfection and cleaning of our buildings and adequate bus routes to transport students. Also noted at that meeting were reports from the sub-committees regarding movement to Phase 3; they will also be reporting to the Steering Committee on Wednesday November 18th.

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the Children' Hospital Association just reported over a million children have been infected, accounting for 11.5% of all those infected. While they may not get acutely sick, they can transmit to others and can suffer terrible consequences from the virus. The district will continue to be vigilant in keeping staff and students safe.

From Frequently Asked Questions dated August 6, 2020 on the website:

Q. When will the district transition from Phase 2 to Phase 3 for students in Grades 3 through 12?

A. The District is committed to providing as much in-person instruction as possible, while adhering strictly to the State's health and safety guidelines. Phase 2 consists of four cohorts that can be combined into two cohorts to enter Phase 3 at a given time when there is assurance that the District can do so safely. At the middle and high school levels, the transition from four cohorts (one day a week) to two cohorts (two days a week) can happen within the structure of the students' daily schedule. The District does not have a timeline for the decision to move to Phase 3.

Factors that will influence this decision include –

- the abatement of COVID-19 cases regionally and statewide
- the removal of interstate travel restrictions
- daily screening results
- the District's capacity to accommodate larger groups while maintaining rigorous health and safety protocols in the schools and on the buses.

The decision to go to Phase 3 for students in grades 3 through 12 will be communicated at that time, when it is safe to do so.

From Amber Montalbano

Mr. Ahearn, Dr. Lamash, and board of education,

Can you please provide district parents with specific information and dates on when Vestal students in grades 3 through 12 will be adding a second day of in person instruction? At each of the past 3 board of education meetings, Mr. Ahearn has stated that 'discussions are ongoing about moving to the next phase.' At the beginning of the school year, parents were told that the cohorts were set up in such a way to make moving to the next phase easier. At the second board of education meeting, Mr. Ahearn stated that moving to the next phase would happen 'sooner than people think.'

I have children in multiple buildings throughout the district. We have only received the survey about moving to the next phase from our elementary principal. Will the middle and high schools also be sending out the survey?

I, along with countless other parents, have sent email after email after email to both Vestal administration and board of education members with no response.

Thank you,
Amber Montalbano, parent of 3 Vestal students

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From Elizabeth De Rose

A sincere thank you to all the teachers and staff working so hard to support learning under such difficult circumstances.

Thank you also to the district for making the difficult decisions needed to keep my children and family safe and healthy.

Elizabeth De Rose

From Nick Robles

Good afternoon,

My questions were not answered; please see green text below:

On Oct 21, 2020, at 9:53 AM, District Clerk <districtclerk@vestal.k12.ny.us> wrote:

Nick Robles

At the Board of Education meeting held October 13, 2020, your questions/comments were read by the Board President to all members in attendance. In your email below, you will see the responses to your questions in **red**. Please note that the Youtube site for this meeting is still available for viewing at <https://youtu.be/lK9iyIGiNeg>

Once I have responded to all that submitted questions, they will be posted on the website as additional FAQs for access by all stakeholders.

Kay Ellis
District Clerk

Mrs Ellis,

Ma'am, thank you for the conversation this morning. Looking to have the following questions answered and read at the board meeting tonight:

1) The Vestal Central School District has failed to establish qualitative criteria for movement between phases 1-4 (reference document titled: Vestal Central School District *Pathway to Recovery: A Plan for the Reopening of Vestal Schools*).

- What benchmarking criteria was used to set initial phases and where is this objective evidence documented for public access?

- Where can established criteria (descriptive in nature) be found for the movement between phases be found for public access?

The transition between phases is outlined in the FAQs on the District's website dated August 6, 2020. Link is below.

https://www.vestal.stier.org/Downloads/FAQs_Rev-Aug65.pdf

The current model of phased reopening is based on a realistic assessment of classroom density that accounts for the fluctuations in class and section sizes. The photo below shows a middle school classroom with desks set 6 feet apart. In addition to student desks, classrooms must accommodate co-teachers and paraprofessionals.

My original question was not answered: The above referenced FAQs does not provide detail on established criteria for benchmarking what phases schools should be in nor what metrics must be attained for transition between phases. Please advise where such detailed criteria can be accessed by the public.

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I appreciate your graphics of the classroom, with that I cannot help but ask why all students/staff must wear masks as well as maintain a 6ft separation? These standards are in excess of NY State requirements - see question 1 of the linked document

(<http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/reopening-schools/school-reopening-faq.pdf>)

From Frequently Asked Questions dated August 14, 2020 on the website:

Q: Will children be required to wear masks once seated in the classroom? If allowed to be unmasked while seated in the classroom, will students be required to put masks on to move about the classroom? (Balkaya/Metzler)

A: Wearing a face covering (mask) is a requirement. Mask breaks will be permitted, however, prior to moving about the classroom or exiting the classroom, students and staff must wear a face covering.

2) What benchmarking sessions have been held with other districts (districts that have identified avenues to hold full time in class schedules) and where can documentation from those sessions including details as to why the Vestal Central School District is unable to pursue similar organizational setup as well as similar schedules layouts be found for public assess?

- If no such sessions where held, why not?

There has not been a regional initiative to benchmark school reopening models.

My original question was not answered: Question pertained to Vestal Central School District initiative. Please describe initiatives taken by the VCSD; if none please detail why a tiger team has not been created to benchmark our successful sister district.

The district does not have a tiger team.

We established five subcommittees for the areas of Teaching & Learning, Health & Safety, Technology, Athletics & Co-Curricular and Transportation. The composition of these committees are listed on the website: <https://www.vestal.stier.org/Downloads/Committee-Members.pdf>

The five sub committees have met beginning in July to review information, protocols, needs and requirements for first the re-opening of the district, and now for moving from Phase 2 to Phase 3. These committees have representation from all areas of the District including administrators, teachers, supervisors, paraprofessionals, nurses, students, parents, support staff, custodial, food service and transportation. They report to the Steering Committee with their recommendations. All of the plans, initiatives, protocols are posted on the Districts' website: <https://www.vestal.stier.org/SchoolReopening.aspx>

Thank you again and I look forward to your response

Nick Robles

From Monica Kelly-Brunza

November 16, 2020

Dear Superintendent Ahearn and Board of Education:

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Board of Education for the safe, rational approach to opening during this dreadful pandemic.

I am a staff member that travels between two buildings. I am thankful to say that the protocols that have been put in place by the district give me confidence that we

are taking the best and safest approach, especially smaller class size to maintain social distancing. This has been particularly important since the numbers in our community and county have been alarming. We have kept the number of cases in our schools to a minimum thanks this cautious approach.

It is clear that your highest priority has been to keep to our precious students safe and healthy, as well their families, grandparents, and staff. We all need to remember that we are in a global pandemic. Thank you for basing your prudent approach on this fact. I believe we have an amazing school community and I know we can weather this storm with your continued commitment to Vestal's excellent education and the health and safety of all.

Appreciatively,

Monica Kelly-Brunza

From Michelle Mones

Dear Vestal Board of Education,

Please share the attached letter at your next BOE meeting during the "Voice of the Public". Thank you for sharing my appreciation for all of our amazing teachers and staff!

Respectfully,
Michelle Mones

November 9, 2022

Dear Vestal Administration and Board of Education,

My name is Michelle Mones, and I am a parent of a [REDACTED] at Tioga Hills Elementary. I wanted to take the time to speak out words of encouragement and thankfulness to our amazing teachers here at Vestal Central School District.

I know that this has been an incredibly stressful time for them and unfortunately the negative and discouraging comments from the community drown out the reality. The reality is that every single day, our students are being met at the door or on their Chromebooks, by teachers that have put in endless hours and many sleepless nights to try and figure out how to teach material in a fun and exciting way, as well as keeping the students they love, safe and healthy during a pandemic.

The task of uniting students that are at home as well as sitting in front of them and engaging both groups is not an easy thing. Building meaningful relationships and connecting with students that either come once or twice a week and in some cases, never physically enter the same room as their teachers and classmates, seems unlikely. Teaching lessons, problem solving technological issues, regularly sanitizing the classroom and the children, as well as assessing each child to see if they are healthy enough to be present in school, comforting the child that is crying but can't be hugged...these are only a few of the challenges that seem like they would be impossible. But, the truth is that our amazing teachers and staff are working together and simultaneously doing each of these things daily.

In closing, my purpose and hope of this letter is to simply state that with every negative comment or unhappy parent, there are far more that cannot express their thankfulness enough. We see the hard work, we acknowledge the tears that are being shed behind closed doors and after school hours, we appreciate the exceedingly difficult task of starting our year in the most conservative way possible.

Although difficult days and decisions are still going to be a part of our 2020-21 school year, please make no mistake that I couldn't be more proud of all that has been done and will continue to be done by our teachers and staff that show true courage. They might be scared, but they face each new day and provide as much normalcy for our children as possible. Better days are ahead, but in the meantime, please hear the words that need to be heard to make it possible for everyone to face tomorrow, knowing they are making a difference and their sacrifices have not gone unnoticed.

With Sincere Thanks,
Michelle C. Mones