

From Sherry Hammaker

Hi – I am a Vestal resident and tax payer as well as Grandparent to two elementary age Grandchildren who spend 4 days a week remote learning at my house and one day of in person school.

I am very happy with all their teachers and know they are doing their best to teach during this difficult time.

It is now October 27th and there is still just vague plans of when the schools will move to two days a week. The next BOE meeting is November 17th just before the holidays. **Are the plans just to wait until 2021 for more in-person days?**

The District's goal is to move to the next phase of instruction and is currently conducting various meetings for planning purposes of determining how and when to move grades 3-12 to Phase 3.

At the last BOE meeting it was mentioned how many were moving to all remote learning basically justifying that in-person learning is not the popular opinion. However, it seems that remote learning one day a week is not worth a possible 14 day quarantine when all the protocols – mask wearing and safe distance are in place. Is there any data that a person that was made to quarantine was then COVID-19 positive? The 14 day quarantine is also causing staff shortage. Again, is there any data of the number of cases of those in quarantine? Is the 14 day quarantine CDC guidelines when all the protocols are followed or the Vestal School District?

Research has shown that hospitalization and fatality rates for school-age children are extremely low. The social and emotional impact that our youth is facing is heart breaking.

The option for more in-person days should be made available. Switching to remote only has left very low numbers in classrooms and there are children that would love to take those seats.

One in-person day is not enough – it is time to move to two in-person days.

Respectfully submitted – Carol Waltersdorf

From Dina Kalina

QUESTIONS FROM DINA KALINA

- We are once again asking why the Vestal Central School District is the only district in the region, if not the state, whose students are attending school one day per week in person.
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From Frequently Asked Questions dated 9/25/20 on the website:

Q: Why is school only being offered to students one day a week while all other schools in the area are offering in-school days two or more days a week?

A: Vestal had various committees working over the summer to devise a plan that focused on health, safety, and instruction of our students and staff. To accomplish this, a low density in the classroom was primary. Also, the District wanted to make sure that all systems and protocols were in place and working before moving to the next phase of cohorts.

Vestal is currently conducting various meetings for planning purposes of moving grades 3-12 to Phase 3.

From Frequently Asked Questions dated 9/2/20 on the website:

Q: Why is Vestal only offering one day a week for students in Grades 3 - 12?

A: The Vestal School District has chosen to use a conservative phase-in model to transition students back to school. The Reopening Committee's approach to planning for reopening centered around starting school with a focus on health and safety for students, staff, and visitors.

Last September, on the first day of school, over 3000 students and 700 staff members walked through our doors. Students attended physical education in groups of 40 or more. Cafeterias routinely served hundreds of students each lunch period. Restrooms, classrooms, and hallways accommodated hundreds of students a day. Throughout the day, students moved around and interacted freely. That cannot happen this year.

There are now a number of new safety and attendance requirements that a school district must conform to. Vestal's conservative approach will allow for a beginning of in-person instruction with the implementation of new cleaning/disinfecting and operational procedures in place. Examples of these new procedures include such items as face covering protocols, cleaning/sanitizing/ disinfecting of buses, classrooms, bathrooms, cafeterias, etc., social distancing in classrooms and buses, and coordinating classroom lessons with remote lessons to enhance the educational experience for our students.

The ultimate District goal is to move to Phase 4 – total in-person instruction. However, if necessary, the plan allows flexibility for the District to move up to Phase 3 (two cohorts for K-12) or back to Phase 1 (fully remote) if conditions mandate it. The District will move to Phase 3 as soon as possible, as long as certain assurances can be made. There is no precise standard for when that would happen. It will be based on a number of factors that include, but are not limited to:

Ø the COVID positive test numbers do not increase within the district, community, county, or region
Ø the District has the capacity to accommodate larger groups while maintaining rigorous health and safety protocols in the schools and on the buses

Ø the District is confident that all new safety and health procedures are effective and can be maintained

Ø Staffing levels are adequate for in-person instruction

No school district has ever undertaken a responsibility such as this. Vestal's decision to begin cautiously ensures that we do everything possible to maintain the safety and health of all students and staff, and to minimize the transmission of the virus to our Vestal families.

From Frequently Asked Questions dated 8/14/20 on the website:

Q: Why is Vestal only offering one day of instruction for grades 3-12?

A: There are a number of factors taken into consideration in this Phase 2 model. The committees' approach to planning for reopening centered around starting school with a focus on health and safety for students, staff, and visitors. It has been five months since students and teachers have been in a classroom. There are now a number of new safety and attendance requirements that a school district must conform to. Vestal's conservative approach will allow for a beginning of in-person instruction with the implementation of new cleaning/disinfecting and operational procedures in place. Examples of these new procedures include such items as face covering protocols, cleaning/sanitizing/disinfecting of buses, classrooms, bathrooms, cafeterias, etc., social distancing in classrooms and buses, and coordinating classroom lessons with remote lessons to enhance the educational experience for our students.

The District will move to Phase 3 (two cohorts for K-12) as long as the COVID numbers do not increase and the District is confident that the new procedures are effective and can be maintained.

The ultimate District goal is to eventually move to Phase 4 – total in-person instruction. However, there are many health and safety factors that need to be considered before this can take place.

From Frequently Asked Questions dated 8/6/20 on the website:

2. Why is Vestal only offering one day a week for students in Grades 3 - 12?

The Vestal School District has chosen to use a conservative model to transition students back to school. There are many safety protocols that need to be established and practiced to prevent the transmission of COVID-19. Schools differ from most other work settings in that they are designed to accommodate large numbers of students and staff. Last September, on the first day of school,

between 300 and 1,000 students rode buses and walked through the doors. They attended physical education in groups of 40 or more. Cafeterias routinely served hundreds of students each lunch period. Restrooms, classrooms, and hallways accommodated hundreds of students a day. Throughout the day, students moved around and interacted freely. That cannot happen this year.

Students in grades 3 through 12 have been divided into four cohorts or groups. It is based on all students attending. In this model, the District has reduced the number of students potentially attending school to approximately 110 students per day at the elementary schools, 190 students per day at the middle school, and 250 students per day at the high school. Small numbers of students allow staff and students to set up the necessary safety protocols that include:

Daily Screenings: Each day, students and staff must complete a daily health screening that includes a checklist and temperature check. Students and staff who present symptoms associated with COVID-19 must be isolated and sent home.

Respiratory and Hand Hygiene: The wearing of masks and washing of hands will be essential to keeping all students and staff safe.

Sanitizing Processes: All areas of the school building will need sanitizing throughout the day. **Social Distancing:** Students and staff must adhere to maintaining proper social distance.

With the four cohorts, class sizes will be small, with between 5 and 8 students per room. This gives faculty an opportunity to know students individually and establish a relationship that, if schools must close, will carry over into their work together under full remote instruction. Low density assures students and staff can feel safe and have sufficient space to properly social distance, while also being able to engage in learning.

No school district has ever undertaken a responsibility such as this. Vestal's decision to begin cautiously ensures we do everything possible to maintain the safety and health of all students and staff, and to minimize the transmission of the virus to our Vestal families.

- We are again demanding that you provide the data that you are using to determine when class sizes and days of attendance will be increasing, a timeline for such a decision and the responsible parties who will be making this decision.

From Voice of the Public dated 10/13/20 on the website

**Question: We have been told that this is Phase 1 and that Phase 2 and forward will include more in-person instruction. What are the specific metrics that need to be reached in order to move to the next phase(s)?*

A. 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

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FROM 9/22:

1. Why is the administration not giving an update to the Board of Education regarding the reopening and the first week of school during the meeting?

In the minutes from the Board meeting 9/22/20, under the superintendent's report is the update given at that meeting. The link is: <https://www.vestal.stier.org/Downloads/2020%209-22%20MIN.pdf>. Also, the Youtu.be video of the meeting is still available at <https://youtu.be/lqJs5LLZrs4>

2. Why are the school buildings sitting empty (without students) on Wednesdays and Fridays, while our students are only able to attend one day per week? And, in discussions with parents from various grade levels, many classes have as few as 3-4 students, and in 3 known situations, there was only 1 student in a class. Why are our buildings and teachers not being used more effectively to optimize in-person attendance for those who want and need more?

A: Planning for asynchronous instruction and the appropriate use of technology requires time. Similarly, office hours and designated time to engage with students in small groups and individually is essential to make sure students feel supported and understand their assignments. At the elementary level, group meetings are conducted each Wednesday. Additionally, teachers schedule individual or small group sessions based on areas of concern or need. Wednesdays are also used to conduct critical meetings related to student support and intervention that can no longer be scheduled during instructional days because substitutes are limited and do not have access to district applications (Zoom, Google Classroom, Seesaw). Response to Intervention team meetings are conducted on Wednesdays. In these meetings administration, faculty, counselors, psychologists, and support specialists meet to identify and respond to students and families who are not engaging in remote instruction and develop plans to support them. Committees on Special Education are now scheduled for Wednesdays.

Fridays are full instructional days conducted with all 3-12 students remotely. Middle school and high school teachers adhere to the student course schedule. 3-5 elementary teachers provide direction instruction in the core areas.

3. Why are teachers given an entire day for planning purposes per week? How is a 45-minute session of "office hours" on Wednesdays fulfilling the contract requirement of a 7.5-hour workday for teachers or the state requirement that our students receive a minimum of 5 hours of instruction per day? What is happening on this day each week that precludes students from both being in the building AND receiving remote instruction?

A: Planning for asynchronous instruction and the appropriate use of technology requires time. Similarly, office hours and designated time to engage with students in small groups and individually is essential to make sure students feel supported and understand their assignments. At the elementary level, classroom meetings are conducted each Wednesday. Additionally, teachers schedule individual or small group sessions based on areas of concern or need. Wednesdays are also used to conduct critical meetings related to student support and intervention that can no longer be scheduled during instructional days because substitutes are limited and do not have access to district applications (Zoom, Google Classroom, Seesaw). Response to Intervention team meetings are conducted on Wednesdays. In these meetings administration, faculty, counselors, psychologists, and support specialists meet to identify and respond to students and families who are not engaging in remote instruction and develop plans to support them. Committees on Special Education are now scheduled for Wednesdays. Professional development workshops have also been a critical function of Wednesday, providing teachers with technical and instructional support for using technology in remote and hybrid environments.

4. Why are our students only receiving two synchronous lessons per class each week?

From Frequently Asked Questions dated 9/25/20 on the website:

Q: Why does the middle school have the most restrictive environment in the district? Children spend 7 hours in a single classroom while HS students can change classes. They wear masks for as long as 3.5 hours without a mask break. The kids have 3 minutes between teacher changes to get up and stretch, but don't really get to move around anywhere else for the entire day. (Two thirds of the kids eat lunch in the classroom, as well.)

A: The current model was designed to minimize the mixing of cohorts and ensure that rooms can be properly sanitized. It is a similar model to the elementary school. The team structure at the middle school allowed for this model to work at the middle school, but not at the high school.

5. Have those mandates been relaxed due to the pandemic? If so, what are the current mandates? (referring to the 900 hours of instruction)

From NYS Reopening Guidance, p. 96: "There are no subject specific time requirements in grades K-6 for any subject with the exception of physical education (PE) (see separate section on PE). Educational programs delivered in these grades should employ the best available instructional practices and resources and be mindful of maximizing instructional time and supports with these young learners."

For grades 7-12, district must provide the comparable of 180 minutes of instruction for a Unit of Study. From NYS Reopening Guidance, p. 98: "Unit of study means at least 180 minutes of instruction per week throughout the school year, or the equivalent. Equivalent shall mean at least 180 minutes of instructional time for instruction delivered in a traditional face to face model or through alternative instructional experiences, including but not limited to through digital technology or blended learning, that represents standards-based learning under the guidance and direction of an appropriately certified teacher. Instructional experiences shall include, but not be limited to: meaningful and frequent interaction with an appropriately certified teacher; academic and other supports designed to meet the needs of the individual student and instructional content that reflects consistent academic expectations as in-person instruction. Any alternative instructional experience must include meaningful feedback on student assignments and methods of tracking student engagement".

6. Why are some teachers able to choose the frequency of synchronous lessons? Again, how are situations like this fulfilling the teacher contract or mandated instructional time?

The secondary faculty and administration have maintained daily synchronous lessons with Zoom to ensure continuity of instruction.

7. How does the district plan to resolve the many technological issues such as lack of devices for every student, connectivity problems, and security issues regarding Zoom?

From Frequently Asked Questions dated 9/25/20 on the website:

Q: What considerations were taken for families with poor internet service, and what steps were put into place to provide these families with adequate resources?

A: The BOCES Administrator for Managed Technology Services reported at the Board of Education meeting on 9/22/20. This meeting can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/lqJs5LLZrs4>

From Frequently Asked Questions dated 9/25/20 on the website:

Q: We were told that all first graders within Vestal schools would be receiving an iPad for home learning. It is the second week of school and we still do not know when these devices will be given to us. In the meantime, we will be using our personal computer. We are fortunate that we are able to do so. What about the students who do not have the means to purchase a device to do the home learning assignments?

A: The devices ordered for first graders have not been delivered yet. Our IT department is now preparing Chromebooks for at least 61 of the remote first graders.

The iPads arrived in the district the week of October 19th. The IT technicians inventoried and activated the devices to our network. The iPads were delivered to each elementary school the week of October 26th. Students were asked to return their district issued Chromebook prior to receiving an iPad. The iPads have been distributed to students (when the student returned their Chromebook).

8. What is the point of having in-person instruction when the student still must utilize their device because the teacher in the classroom is teaching to the students who are remote learning via Zoom?

The district must work with its current staffing resources to provide instruction to in-person and remote students in a way that allows for continuity of learning aligned to the state's guidance. The district does not have the staffing to create separate in-person and remote cohorts at the secondary level. At the K-2 elementary level, the district has accommodated the needs of remote learners by assigning them either to a separate remote homeroom, or providing them with remote instruction using a reading or math specialist. In grades 3-5, the district has designated Fridays for fully remote instruction.

9. Why do Vestal students in the 8-1-1 and 12-1-1 classrooms only attend four half days yet students from the BOCES Oak Tree program attend four full days inside a Vestal school building?

The District established a need for Wednesdays to be a day for "deep cleaning". The students are attending for a shortened day (not a half-day), which was designed in order to ensure that our remote special class students were able to have concentrated time at the end of the day with their teachers.

10. Why is VCSD running a full bus route for: 2 to 3 students per bus?

The majority of our buses are 70 passenger buses. We have been doubling and tripling bus runs based on cohorts to limit the number of runs. If we combine more runs, the route will be too long and buses will not arrive to school on time. Likewise, it will take longer to transport students home in the evening.

We are required to transport parochial school students to their school locations. We also transport BOCES and special program students to various facilities within Broome and Tioga county. Some of these buses may have a small number of students riding the bus.

Many special education runs require less density of students on the buses.

11. How is it considered instruction for elementary students to check in for a few minutes each day for a morning meeting and then not again until the end of the school day for a song and a goodbye?

This characterization cannot be applied universally to the K-5 instructional model and reflects a limited description of a typical elementary day. NYS Reopening Guidance (P.65) places a strong emphasis on "creating a welcoming and caring school community that ensures its members are met with compassion and the support they need to achieve and thrive. Academic learning cannot be effective until the basic human needs for physical and emotional safety are met." At the elementary level, classroom meetings are critical points in the day when elementary teachers connect with their students, gauge their level of participation, review and organize asynchronous lessons, and deliver synchronous instruction.

12. How much of the middle school is still under construction and therefore not able to be used for classroom space, making class sizes even smaller?

Currently we have all of our first floor science classrooms under construction. The Art classrooms and Family Consumer Science classrooms are also under construction and expected to be ready by Thanksgiving break. We expect to have the first floor science classrooms ready by December. The next phase (beginning in December/January) will take classrooms 201, 202, 203, 204, 205 and 206.

13. Did the district look at using any other spaces such as the administration building for classroom space so that students could attend in person more than one day per week? If not, why not?

From Frequently Asked Questions dated 9/25/20 on the website:

Q: Based on the NYS Guidelines given to follow for reopening, what other spaces were looked at? How are auditoriums and gymnasiums being utilized? What about our outdoor facilities and District Office building now that daycare is not being provided there, community spaces, etc.?

A: The District looked at various options to try and increase instructional space. For example, the use of tents was considered. However, due to the approaching winter weather, this was not deemed a viable option. Also, the availability of renting tents was limited. Other ideas were discussed and considered. As for the gymnasiums, they are still designated for PE classes. Auditoriums are used for music classes to some extent, but this space would not work as well for day-to-day classes. The re-opening guidance document from the NYS Education Department "Changes to Space Utilization and/or Alterations" (pg. 49) required the District to submit architectural plans to the State for review and approval. Those spaces would then be unavailable for intended use (i.e. gymnasiums for physical exercise, cafeterias for lunch space). The District Office leases space to Cub Care Children's Center and Senior Center that are under yearly contracts.

14. Why is it not OK to have that many students in a class any other day?

It is not a typical practice to combine classes. At the elementary level, there was one situation when a teacher was quarantined, when two classes were combined for a set number of days. This became a cohort for that period of time and met the guidelines for adequate classroom space for social distancing.

15. Why there was no consideration by the district to factor how many students were going to go completely remote before class sizes were determined?

Planning for the 2020-2021 elementary sections began in February 2020. The sections were finalized in June. During the summer, new registrations and the retooling of the elementary model to accommodate different cohorts resulted in a shift in enrollments. The survey of parents in August 2020 was the basis for the development of cohorts.

16. How was it determined how many students were safely able to be placed in each classroom in each building? Were the classroom sizes measured to determine how many desks could be placed in each classroom to optimize attendance? This is what occurred in other districts. If classrooms were not measured, why not?

From Frequently Asked Questions dated 9/25/20 on the website:

Q: What information was used to determine the square footage of classrooms vs. number of students in a class that would adhere to the physical distancing guidelines?

A: One of the criteria used to calculate maximum class size during this period of COVID was the amount of social distancing available in a general classroom. Room by room calculations were done with six-foot spacing required between desks. Other various factors included classroom layouts in different sizes and configurations, occupancy count (students/teacher/aide) for each room, etc. The average classroom can hold between 6-12 total (students and staff). That information was then used to help create the cohorts. Additionally, when determining cohorts within the master schedules of each building, class enrollments fluctuate based on days of week, courses, remote students, and section sizes. This results in variations in class sizes that could only be established once the schedules were formalized and schools opened.

17. If the schools are closed due to state mandates or an outbreak, will this same schedule of remote learning continue? Should we expect that our children will only be receiving 2/5 of a total education this entire school year?

The district is making every effort possible to provide continuity of instruction that can align to the scope and sequence that existed prior to school closure in March 2020. Adjustments have been made to the elementary curriculum to streamline instruction to core concepts and skills that maintain adherence to the states ELA and math scope and sequence. Secondary teachers adhere to the secondary scope and sequence.

18. Who is making the decision for what constitutes reason for closing the schools entirely?
What data is being used?

We will continue to work with the Department of Health to make decisions regarding contact tracing, isolation, and quarantining of students and staff. Based on these numbers, decisions will be made regarding closing schools for any duration of time.

- Why are these students not being given the option to move around the building and switch classes when the high schoolers will be doing that?

From Frequently Asked Questions dated 9/25/20 on the website:

Q: Why does the middle school have the most restrictive environment in the district? Children spend 7 hours in a single classroom while HS students can change classes. They wear masks for as long as 3.5 hours without a mask break. The kids have 3 minutes between teacher changes to get up and stretch, but don't really get to move around anywhere else for the entire day. (Two thirds of the kids eat lunch in the classroom, as well.)

A: The current model was designed to minimize the mixing of cohorts and ensure that rooms can be properly sanitized. It is a similar model to the elementary school. The team structure at the middle school allowed for this model to work at the middle school, but not at the high school.

- How can any educator believe that this plan is appropriate for any student?

The team structure at the middle school allows for the establishment of cohorts. As a result, we have been able to reduce the number of students who must be quarantined per the Department of Health Guidelines. Educators believe that all students need to be in school to learn. The district must ensure that such learning occur in a manner that is safe for students and staff and adheres to state and country health and safety guidelines.

- How can anyone expect any of these students to have any desire or motivation to attend school, learn, or complete work under these circumstances?

The district is actively working to reach to and support students and families who are not able to access learning under the current model. The district has systems in place to track and monitor student engagement. Professional development conducted on Wednesday focuses on the use of technology to engage and motivate students.

From Gabby Passante-Vu

Dear Members of the Vestal Board of Education,

Please read this letter at your Board Meeting on Tuesday, October 27th, 2020. I am writing to you, again, in regards to my disappointment in Vestal Central School Districts outline plan in “Vestal Central School District Pathway to Recovery: A Plan for the Reopening of Vestal Schools”. My initial letter to you was dated August 2nd, 2020. More than a week had passed, since I submitted my email

and I did not get a response back. I emailed reopenvestal@vestal.k12.ny.us on August 11th, stating I have not heard a response. Michelle Lewis replied to my email with the following response “Thank you for sharing your concerns. The District is in the process of reviewing and formulating responses to the communications that have been received from parents.” Today is October 15th, 2020, and still no has contacted me in regards to my questions, comments and concerns. At the Board Meeting some of the members kept referring us to the FAQ on the Vestal website; which once again, does not address all of my concerns in my original letter back in August. Below is my letter from August and would like it to be read in its entirety, because I believe my concerns are still relevant.

Dear Vestal School District,

I am very disappointed after reading the document “Vestal Central School District Pathway to Recovery: A Plan for the Reopening of Vestal Schools”. The district shared the results of the parent survey to us, and the proposed plan does a fantastic job accommodating to the 26.5% families who want their child(ren) to participate in school virtually; offering 100% remote option.

On the flip side, the school district provided an inadequate plan for the 41.6% families who want our child(ren) back on-site learning alongside with their peers. The plan submitted to the state proposed a one day a week on-site instruction for 3rd - 12th graders, with intentions of full in-person instruction in phase 4. With little information to the criteria needed to get to this phase. The only thing I read in the plan that addressed this was, “as the COVID-19 health emergency dictates.” which is vague, and in that statement alone, is not measurable/quantifiable, and frankly unsatisfactory.

The first page of the plan states “Our community has expressed diverse, and at times, opposite view points.” and “Many of our families want to minimize in-person instruction until the threat of COVID-19 has passed. Many other families want a return to in-person instruction.” As the numbers of the survey showed, there are more families that want in-person instruction for their child(ren) versus those who want remote instruction, versus the 31.5% families who are unsure. The proposed plan is inadequate based on the results from the survey. I understand that the school is mandated to adhere to NYS Reopening Guidelines, but I am struggling to understand how our neighboring school districts UE, ME, and Owego-Apalachin are able to propose a plan that offers two day on-site instruction, versus Vestal’s proposed plan of only one day on-site instruction for their 3rd-12th graders.

From my point of view, the plan to reopen schools in the Vestal district should be re-evaluated and take into consideration the 41.6% families who want their child(ren) in school. It is important that they are on-site to learn the material presented by their teachers and ancillary staff, and it is vitally important for them to be on-site to learn skills that can’t be taught in a remote setting, such as social skills, coupled with emotional development.

I hope you take this letter in the spirit of a concern parent who wants the best for her children; incoming 3rd and 4th graders. A parent who has taken into consideration the climate of COVID-19, and the well-being of her children academically, emotionally and mentally. Thank you for taking time to read my concerns, and I strongly encourage the school district to take time to re-evaluate their plans on reopening their schools; offering more on-site instruction for our children, their students.
Sincerely,

“Gabby” Passante-Vu

I attended the Board meeting on Tuesday, October 13th, 2020 and once again, no one on the Board, or Jeff Ahearn, or Laura Lamash, can provide us a clear answer as to what benchmarks, criterions, or qualitative measures need to be met in order to move to Phase 3; and eventually to Phase 4. On the flip

side, there are also no benchmarks, criteria or qualitative measures, that would, God forbid, move our children to Phase 1. Only that there are intentions of making plans to move to Phase 3 within the next couple of Board meetings. This question of moving from phase to phase has been asked previously and the 'answer' is posted on the FAQ. But this is inadequate; 1) the link provided in the FAQ gives you an error message "404 – File or directory not found" when you click on it. 2) the FAQ states "The transition between phases is outlined in the FAQs on the District's website dated August 6, 2020." The issue, again, is this is a non-answer. The August 6, 2020 "Vestal Central School District Pathway to Recovery: A Plan for the Reopening of Vestal Schools" only gives us the name of the phases, but no actual guidelines, rules, etc to move from one phase to another.

I get the impression that there has there been zero discussion let alone a plan that has been put in place in order to move our children to Phase 3. In the same Board meeting on October 13th, 2020 it was shared that there are 9 confirmed COVID cases in the school district, and NONE of those cases were contracted during school. It appears that Vestal teachers, staff, custodians have done a fantastic job keeping the schools sanitized. So why can't our children move to Phase 3? Also, in the same meeting, it was shared that 100 more students have moved to Homeschooling since September, with a decrease number of student enrollment in the Vestal School District, how does this impact state and federal financial aid to the school district. What will it take for the Vestal Central School District to provide more onsite education for our children?

At the October 13th, 2020 Board Meeting, Christina and Mark brought up some very good questions, and they received beat-around-the-bush non-answers from the other Board members, Jeff and Laura. After attending this Board meeting, I am no longer just disappointed, but am disgusted at how things are run. It is clear that whoever or whomever are pulling the strings, may it be the Steering Committee and/or Governance Body have zero interest in providing more onsite instruction to our children, because there has been zero communication in moving forward to phase 3.

If a Board member would like to answer my questions, really answer my questions, and not give me a song and dance, please feel free to email me. My email address is provided below, do not read my email aloud at the Board Meeting.

Bottom line, my QUESTION is: What are the benchmarks, criteria or qualitative measures to move through the phases. Please do not refer me to the FAQ, which leads me to "Vestal Central School District Pathway to Recovery: A Plan for the Reopening of Vestal Schools", this only provides me with the name of the phases. Please prove concrete measurable variables for Phase 1, 2, 3, and 4, and not something arbitrary.

"Gabby" Passante-Vu

The decision to move through the phases is based on health and safety criteria and benchmarks.

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.
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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 James Sacco

I have read that at least 22 school districts in Texas are ending remote "learning" as 40-70% of students subjected to that regimen are failing. Schools in Wake County, NC, Indianapolis, New Canaan, CT, Des Moines and Miami either have or soon will welcome students back in for live learning. there are many others. Note the wide geographic reach of the return to normalcy. Yet, Vestal remains in "Phase 2".

Has the administration assessed how well (or poorly) remote "learning" has gone thus far? If so, what metrics were used? Has the Board been advised of these methodologies and conclusions? If not, why not? why does so much of the rest of the country see the futility of remote "learning" and this school district does not?

The District is gathering information from teachers and administrators regarding student success during this semester. Students identified as struggling are given assistance and support as needed. Since the learning model for this year is completely different from last year, the comparison between student grades, attendance and testing results from last year at this time to this year would be difficult to assimilate. Still the District will be looking general comparisons of grade level achievement at the mid-marking period timeframe and again at the end of the marking period.

thank you for your time and attention to this matter,

Jim Sacco

From L. Nathan Tumey

Questions for school board meeting: (please read aloud if time allows)

How is the school assessing the success of the current hybrid learning model? Can the school provide any metrics showing how student learning outcomes are being impacted? This could include grades (versus this time last year), attendance (versus this time last year), or standardized testing results (versus last year). It is critically important that we are able to assess whether the current learning model is "working" for our students. Thank you,

Nathan Tumey
Vestal, NY

The District is gathering information from teachers and administrators regarding student success during this semester. Students identified as struggling are given assistance and support as

needed. Since the learning model for this year is completely different from last year, the comparison between student grades, attendance and testing results from last year at this time to this year would be difficult to assimilate. Still the District will be looking general comparisons of grade level achievement at the mid-marking period timeframe and again at the end of the marking period.

From Carol Waltersdorf

Hi – I am a Vestal resident and tax payer as well as Grandparent to two elementary age Grandchildren who spend 4 days a week remote learning at my house and one day of in person school.

I am very happy with all their teachers and know they are doing their best to teach during this difficult time.

It is now October 27th and there is still just vague plans of when the schools will move to two days a week. The next BOE meeting is November 17th just before the holidays. **Are the plans just to wait until 2021 for more in-person days?**

The District's goal is to move to the next phase of instruction and is currently conducting various meetings for planning purposes of determining how and when to move grades 3-12 to Phase 3.

At the last BOE meeting it was mentioned how many were moving to all remote learning basically justifying that in-person learning is not the popular opinion. However, it seems that remote learning one day a week is not worth a possible 14 day quarantine when all the protocols – mask wearing and safe distance are in place. Is there any data that a person that was made to quarantine was then COVID-19 positive? The 14 day quarantine is also causing staff shortage. Again, is there any data of the number of cases of those in quarantine? Is the 14 day quarantine CDC guidelines when all the protocols are followed or the Vestal School District?

Research has shown that hospitalization and fatality rates for school-age children are extremely low. The social and emotional impact that our youth is facing is heart breaking.

The option for more in-person days should be made available. Switching to remote only has left very low numbers in classrooms and there are children that would love to take those seats.

One in-person day is not enough – it is time to move to two in-person days.

Respectfully submitted – Carol Waltersdorf
