

From Katie Aton Nabywaniec

Dear members of the Vestal School Board and Administration,

As a tax payer, as an educator, and as a mother of three Vestal students, I am writing to address the Vestal Administration and BOE members with a few questions and concerns regarding our current instructional plan.

First, I was pleased to see that the amount of synchronous instruction has increased for the high school. I have said this before and I will say it again: Vestal's teachers are the district's greatest assets. I am advocating for more in-person instruction, because I truly value what Vestal's teachers have to offer our children, and I believe that they learn best in an educational, school environment. I am disheartened to hear that questioning Vestal's reopening plan and advocating for more face-to-face instruction for their children has been interpreted as parents being impatient and unhappy with teachers. We are unhappy with the district for devising a plan that lacks much of the in-person instruction that other neighboring districts are providing during a critical developmental period. Again, I am not unhappy with our amazing teachers - they are the reason my other two children are still enrolled in Vestal!

Second, as of 9/28, I have pulled my [REDACTED] to homeschool [REDACTED]. The "Hybrid" learning model was beyond failing this bright, motivated learner. To be clear, we decided to homeschool [REDACTED] because [REDACTED] was not receiving the Fair and Appropriate Education [REDACTED] has a right to. The "hybrid" model that Vestal has offered their families is basically a remote option. One day of in-person instruction for every four days of remote learning is not hybrid. In addition to this, the ONE day [REDACTED] was at school, [REDACTED] was asked to be on Zoom during certain classes...more time on a screen! This was unacceptable to me. We pulled our child because we were unhappy with Vestal's current plan and lack of any communication about moving forward. The plan in place is not child-centered and there hasn't been any information provided about when or how that will change. This is extremely dis-heartening to me.

My own experience has stirred some questions about how the district's policy is affecting other students and brings up additional concerns. Please provide a response to my questions below:

***Question: How are students who qualify for AIS receiving their additional support?**

Depending on their choice of instruction, students will receive AIS services while attending in person or remotely. The re-opening plan posted on our website does address AIS services for students under the section VI. Supporting the Most Vulnerable Students (page 32.) Link is below.

https://www.vestal.stier.org/Downloads/Pathway_ReopeningPlan2020.pdf

***Question: For students who receive Related Services, how are they receiving these services on the days they are not physically at school?**

Arrangements are made to provide services to students in accordance with their IEP. See the FAQs dated August 14, 2020 on the website, under the Special Education section. Link is below.

https://www.vestal.stier.org/Downloads/FAQs_Aug14-20202.pdf

*Question: For the student government report, how can students submit their comments or concerns?

Carlin Reyen is the student body representative to the Board of Education. She (or her designee) report activities, concerns, events and matters of interest to the Board at each meeting. Students could email or contact her with comments or contact the Board via districtclerk@vestal.k12.ny.us

*Question: My husband and I were told that the steering committee for the re-opening plan recommended two days of in-person instruction. Who made the decision to provide instruction one day per week and why did they go against the recommendation of the steering committee?

The steering committee was designed to review information and to make recommendations to the governance body. The governance body was comprised of the Board President, Superintendent and both Assistant Superintendents. Link is below.

<https://www.vestal.stier.org/Downloads/Committee-Members.pdf>

*Question: The district's Mission Statement states: "Student's efforts to learn and grow are supported by assuring ALL a positive educational environment." While the current plan may be conducive to learning for some, it is certainly not for ALL! Please explain to me, how this model that Vestal has put into motion is "assuring all a positive educational environment" for 1) students with special needs 2) students with home lives that are not conducive to a remote-learning model and 3) students who do not have internet or other infrastructures available to them, to access the curriculum and instruction via remote learning.

Students with special needs or students who struggle to connect remotely are identified by school administrators, psychologists, counselors and teachers and the District provides support.

*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)?

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

*Question: How many Vestal families are now homeschooling their children and of those how many have pulled their students because of their discontent with Vestal's plan?

As of 9/24/20 there are 187 students being homeschooled grades K-12. Between 9/14/20 and 10/13/20, there has been a net increase in remote instruction of 50 students K-12.

It is the responsibility for the School Board and Administration to advocate for these children and these families. Vestal, you are failing them! It is your responsibility to educate ALL children and provide them legally with FAIR AND APPROPRIATE EDUCATION. The remote option is available to families who choose it. Families that understand that this model will not work for their children deserve a better option.

I will leave you with a copy of parts of Vestal's Core Beliefs and mission statement taken right from the Vestal Central School District Webpage today. I urge you all to read it and ask yourselves if your current model, and lack of matrix to move forward, is living up to this mission. I urge you to speak up on behalf of those who cannot advocate for themselves. The children of our community deserve more from us as a district. Again, there is a choice for families who want remote learning. So it is time to focus on the children who need to be in school.

Please do better Vestal. Our children deserve it.

Support

Students' efforts to learn and grow are supported by assuring all a positive educational environment.

The District will continue its pursuit of excellence and accountability. A planning model is in place, with shared decision making as the key element. Stakeholders, including parents, staff at all levels and students continue to have input as five-year educational plans are implemented and updated in each of the district's building. The goal of every building planning team is to address and improve student achievement.

Family Communications:

Effective home and school communications are an integral part of the education of every child. Furthermore, the Vestal Central School District believes that families have a right and a responsibility to be involved in their child's education, and that student learning and achievement are enhanced when parents and staff work collaboratively.

Information Sharing:

A well-informed public is an asset to the school district. The school district has a responsibility to formally and informally share information with families and the larger school community. With timely and accurate information diverse groups in the community have the opportunity to make thoughtful decisions that support our children.

Sincerely,
Katie Nabywaniec
Katie Aton Nabywaniec
Owner and Educator, Bee Bop Clubhouse



From Amber Montalbano

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

It has been 3 weeks since the last board of education meeting, held on September 22nd. During those 3 weeks, have you developed guidelines for moving Vestal schools to the next phase? You stated at the meeting on 9/22 that you didn't have any specific guidelines established at that time. I hope in the past 3 weeks you have been able to develop some and are ready to now share them with parents across the district. Are you planning on distributing a survey to parents about moving to the next phase? This was also asked at the last board of ed mtg. How many more weeks will we wait until we receive any type of communication regarding moving to the next phase?

I personally do not believe that you have intentions of moving to the next phase in the near future as nothing has been communicated and the opinions of all parents have not been sought out. The lack of communication from the Vestal administration is disappointing. I have sent numerous emails since August, and I can say that not a single one has been answered or returned.

Regarding moving to the next phase, I have 2 specific examples/ questions regarding my own children. I have 3 children attending Vestal schools.

There are 3 students in my fourth grader's Thursday cohort class. I have been in the 4th grade classrooms at African Rd Elementary School. They are able to hold MANY more students than 3, while still maintaining social distancing guidelines. Why can't his Thursday cohort be combined with the Monday cohort at this time, so that 6 or 7 students would be learning together?

The decision to combine cohorts must be accomplished at the district level and not by individual buildings. The current K-12 model accommodates fluctuations in class sizes and results in classes ranging from 4 to 10 students.

There are 3 kindergarten classrooms at African Rd. Elementary school. Each of these 3 classrooms and kindergarten teachers only has students in person/ present on Mondays and Thursdays. There are no kindergarten students attending African Rd. on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Friday because a large number of kindergarten students chose to be remote. **Is the board of ed aware that these 3 kindergarten classrooms are empty 3 days a week?** There are 8 children in my son's kindergarten class at African Rd on Monday and Thursday. If only these 8 students are hybrid and the rooms are empty on the other days, why can't the kindergarten students at African Rd. attend 4 days per week? They would not be mingling with any students that they are not already around. The 8 students attend on Monday and Thursday, they could add Tuesday and Friday for those same 8 students since the classrooms are empty.

The kindergarten classrooms may appear "empty" because these classroom teachers are providing remote instruction to students at home. On these days the classroom teachers are working all day with remote students.

My children's teachers are doing a tremendous job of teaching given the current circumstances. However, in person instruction can never be replaced and is vital for our young children.

Thank you,
Amber Montalbano

From James Sacco

The World Health Organization has reversed itself and has urged world leaders stop using lockdowns as the primary control method against the spread of COVID. The Trump administration has echoed those concerns, citing numerous deleterious consequences, including an increase in child abuse. Last week, a number of medical practitioners and other experts signed The Great Barrington Declaration which, in pertinent part, stated that "current lockdown policies are producing devastating effects on short- and long-term public health....Those who are not vulnerable should immediately be allowed to resume life as normal." New Jersey's governor just signed an executive order allowing the resumption of contact practices and competitions for certain organized sports in indoor settings. Local media have reported on high school football being played just over the border in PA. Statistics continue to circulate that American colleges test obsessively with the positives resulting in no fatalities and hospitalizations literally below 1/10,000. NCAA and the NFL are playing football. Yet, our children in Vestal are stuck in "Phase 2" which is only 1 day a week in person (with extreme restrictions) and no sports.

why are these decisions being made by (a yet unspecified) group controlled by the administration and not the school board? Does not NYS law provide that it is the Borad of Education that sets policies and procedures?

The Board of Education is charged with setting District policy, hiring the Superintendent and establishing the budget. While the Board is not directly involved in the day to day operations of the District, they are kept informed via email, phone calls, meetings as needed.

other than the pursuit of a political agenda, given the above information (and much else), what possible justification is there to indefinitely continue to limit in person attendance to 1-day a week?

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

are you claiming that it is possible to eliminate all cases? If so, what is your scientific basis for that belief?

No.

From Joseph Nabywaniec

Please explain IN DETAIL why the Tuesday cohorts class sizes are larger then the Monday and Thursday cohorts class sizes. This means that when/if vestal ever goes to 2 days and combines the monday/Thursday cohorts and sends the Tuesday cohorts on fridays that the Monday/Thursday cohorts class size becomes what the Tuesdays class sizes are now. So why is it ok to have larger class sizes on Tuesdays but not Mondays and Thursdays?

Cohort sizes are influenced by parent choice and the levels of remote students. The decision to transition to Phase 3 will require some realignment of cohorts.

From Christina Nush

Good evening Mr Nunes,

I have 4 children currently enrolled in the Vestal school district. We chose the hybrid plan for all 4 of our children. We had very high hopes Vestal would offer a better reopening plan than what we are currently in. One day of in person instruction is not nearly enough to count as an education. My 3 older children sit in their bedroom alone from 7:40am until at least 2:30 on school days. This is not an education. After that they have homework to complete so they are in their rooms on the chrome book even longer, alone again. No social interaction. Not even with their own siblings. How is this good for any child? Their mental and physical health is at risk and the district does not seem to be concerned.

██████████ has Down Syndrome and attends the SPARK program at Clayton Ave. I am curious to know why children who are at highest risk to fall behind in school, children who have the most difficult time completing even the easiest of tasks on remote learning days, children who need many professionals to help educate them...why are these students not entitled to a full day of school? The reopening plan said they get 4 days of in person instruction. Their school day is currently ending at 1:00 pm. Please explain to me why they can not be at school for the entire school day. Essentially they are missing out on 8 hours of school. 8 hours of social interaction. 8 hours with a team of professionals trained in educating them. I am aware there are other students in the district with special needs that attend other programs and they receive 5 days of in person instruction. Why can our students in the spark program not receive the same? In the very least why can they not get 4 FULL days of school?

I would like this question be raised at the board meeting tomorrow evening during the voice of the public.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,
Christina Nush
Parent to a ██████████ grade student.

The FAQ on our website dated September 2, 2020 includes an updated Special Education section that outlines the in-person instruction for Spark and AIM students. After 1pm in the afternoon is time set aside for remote student instruction.

From Ron and Michele Aton

Good morning everyone, thank you in advance for hearing our concerns about the current educational plan in place in Vestal School District.

We are writing to you as taxpayers in your district, but most importantly as grandparents of children who are students in Vestal schools. We are very concerned about the lack of in person education they are receiving. They want to be in their classrooms learning directly from their teachers . This is a huge loss for them and we are asking when you anticipate increasing their in person education? We have 3 other grandchildren who attend a different

school district which borders Vestal. That district is attending minimally every other day with younger students attending 5 days. I am hopeful that there are discussions at your meetings looking for a plan to increase their in person education. If it can be done safely less than 2 miles from their home in Vestal, there is no reason it cannot be safely done in Vestal also.

Thank you for your consideration on this very important issue.

Sincerely, Ron and Michele Aton

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

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From Amber Montalbano

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

If logistics do not allow for moving the middle and high schools to the next phase, have you considered moving just the elementary buildings to the next phase? So all students grades K - 5 would attend 2 days per week?

There are several districts in the area that have their elementary students attending full time, while their middle and high school students do not. I feel this is crucial for young learners.

Grades K - 2 currently attend 2 days per week, but 3rd through 5th graders do not. These young children should not be learning from a computer 4 days per week. Please consider moving the elementary grades to the next phase.

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

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From Nick Robles

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:

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?

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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.



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?

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

- If no such sessions were held, why not?

Thank you again and I look forward to your response

Nick Robles
607-624-4528

From Eliav Bock

I hope you can include this question/comment in the upcoming Vestal School Board meeting.

I am a parent of two children in Vestal Hills Elementary. My kids are remote learners having vastly different experiences. The [REDACTED], in a remote only class, has a teacher focused on the remote children each day. The teacher gears her lessons to these learners offering equal time for all. I listen into the lessons, and can hear that the remote children are thriving, all things considered.

My [REDACTED] is in a hybrid class; the hybrid model is not effective for remote only learners. Among the myriad of issues, **there is no equivalent in their schedule to the full day of small-group in class instruction that the in-person children are receiving.** It does not take an expert in education to see how these online learners are being left behind because of this failing system.

Why is Vestal not offering remote only options, with equal learning time as in person kids, to families who opt for this throughout the elementary school grades? If there are not enough students within one class at an elementary school to allow for a remote only cohort, then why is each elementary school being asked to figure this out on their own rather than have district wide remote options?

Our children deserve better than this failing hybrid model.

I look forward to hearing the response from members of the school board.

Eliav Bock
Vestal Resident

The current structure of establishing hybrid and remote cohorts is building based. This means that cohort groups are established at each building based on grade level and section enrollments. The intention is to maintain building based cohorts to facilitate transition to Phase 3 and eventually full reopening in such a way that students remain connected to and engaged with their home school community.
