

## Frequently Asked Questions 9/25/2020

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>.

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.

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.

Q: Children under 19 are the least vulnerable to this virus. Why then are you treating them as though they are the most vulnerable?

A: These children may be considered less vulnerable, but the region has had reported cases over the summer and recent weeks. The Vestal School District is now dealing with two current "positive" tests of our students as of September 20, 2020.

Q: After the first three weeks, we were told that our students would have two opportunities for synchronous learning (their in-person day and one "live, virtual" instruction lesson). So our children are being "taught" two times a week by a teacher?

A: After three weeks of instruction, each teacher will provide a minimum of two synchronous lessons a week. For example, a student with seven classes will have a minimum of fourteen synchronous lessons a week and between two and seven synchronous lessons a day. Additionally, students have access to daily office hours and on Wednesdays. The pacing of synchronous lessons allows for students to have screen breaks and complete assigned coursework during the day, in addition to homework completion outside of the school day.

Q: The Vestal track was closed to the public all summer and is still closed now that school is back in session. When will this be reopened to the public?

A: The State initially closed playgrounds, fields, stadiums, and buildings to all outside use to prevent group activities from taking place during the closure. When the closure was lifted, it was left up to the Districts as to whether they would open locally. Districts were responsible to monitor group activities and ensure social distancing. Our playgrounds, fields, tennis courts, and pickleball courts were open for individual use. The District could not ensure that group activities would not take place within the stadium. (Safety reasons: could not open restrooms, continuously clean water fountains, or ensure social distancing by the public.) The stadium is now open to PE classes and occasional walkers during the day. The stadium will continue to be closed during the evenings until further notice.

Q: The American Academy of Pediatrics has long recognized that screen time in excess of two hours per day is detrimental to the developing brain. Why should we be comfortable with you requiring far in excess of this number indefinitely?

A: In the current model, students receive the delivery of synchronous lessons. This is designed in such a way that students have a minimum of two interactions a day (grades K-5) and two interactions a week (grades 6-12).

Q: How and when is the State COVID Dashboard updated?

A: The District was unable to access the NYS portal for COVID reporting until Friday, September 18. New York State corrected this issue on September 18. The District has submitted required data to NYS on a daily basis since that date.

The NYS COVID Dashboard is updated by the Superintendent's office every afternoon once information is verified by the buildings and Broome County Department of Health. It is our understanding that NYS updates their website the following day. The COVID-19 School Report Card can be viewed at <https://schoolcovidreportcard.health.ny.gov/#/home>

Q: As per the reopening plan, some classes have 1 or 2 kids...most have 4 or 5 kids. Are you taking attendance regarding class size?

A: Attendance for in-person and remote is being recorded period by period and daily. This data will be used in discussions to move to Phase 3.

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.

Q: Why are teachers teaching to the camera (remotely) and to the kids in class at the same time? The kids in class are seeing the teacher's lesson on their devices.

A: Some teachers may choose to have students in class joining the Zoom meetings so they can engage with their classmates at home. In the first week, teachers were getting accustomed to teaching with in-person and remote students at home. This is a new model.

Q: What are teachers' itineraries on Wednesdays?

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.

Q: Were entire classes of students forced to quarantine due to the COVID case reported at VHS this week? If so, this policy seems to directly violate the guidance from the CDC and NYS.

A: The Broome County Health Department has conveyed that contact tracing for schools includes all individuals in the same room for more than 10 minutes, not simply individuals that are within 6 feet of the positive case.

Q: How many Board members and Steering Committee members were in favor of the reopening plan that Vestal approved?

A: There were over 100 individuals that volunteered to serve on the Steering Committee and Sub-committees. Countless hours were spent on developing the reopening plan. Student and staff health and safety, along with instructional resources, were weighed heavily in this plan. Board members have been included throughout the process and were invited to sit on reopening subcommittees that developed and reviewed District protocols. A few of them \* did participate. The Board has been updated continuously since the inception of the COVID-19 pandemic. They are included in updates sent out to parents/staff, and the Superintendent regularly updates them by email, phone calls, board meetings, etc. Any board member having a question or concern has an open-door to the Superintendent to ask questions and have discussions.

\*Committee listings are included on the District's website under the School Reopening heading.

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.

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.