

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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.

Q: Why can't we double this number?

A: As indicated in the answer above, the District will move to Phase 3 (doubling class size) when assured that COVID numbers are stable and the new procedures are working.

Q: Is there a possibility of having outdoor classes while the weather holds up?

A: We are looking into outside classrooms and the feasibility of having tents set up. However, the reality is that heaters and fans may not solve all the variables that could impact an outdoor learning environment. Strong winds, lightning, and rain are some of the variables that can't be controlled. Even under a tent, rain softens the ground, making it difficult or unsafe for some students with mobility issues. The District has limited possibility of placing tents on pavement as this would take over the parking areas. Students or staff prone to allergies would also be a variable to consider. Finally, if we were to successfully provide outdoor learning for fall, the next issue would be the winter weather. At this time of year, students would need to move into the buildings and there would then be the challenges of finding adequate space while providing social distancing. As a District, we have to consider what is best for our students and staff as a whole.

Q: How will improvements to the system (remote learning system) be implemented and teachers trained effectively on its use for the entire upcoming school year?

A: What we learned from March to June is the need for consistent expectations regarding student schedules and remote learning expectations. Our faculty will have training provided in student learning platforms, virtual meetings, and hybrid learning models prior to September 14th. The non-negotiables will center around student schedules, learning expectations, communication expectations, and grading policy.

Q: Childcare for families - is this something the school has thought of or planned for?

A: The District has had discussions on childcare availability in the Vestal area and we understand the impact and concerns of our parents. We have reached out to outside entities to determine available options.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Q: If a child with an IEP or 504 enrolls for in-person instruction will they also receive their related services in-person?

A: There is no guarantee that related services i.e. OT, speech, PT, counseling will be able to be provided in-person. Students may have to receive remote related services if scheduling does not permit in-person opportunities.

Q: If the parent of a child with an IEP or 504 chooses remote instruction, can their child still receive in-person related services?

A: Yes, depending on: (1) our scheduling ability to see students in-person and (2) availability of space in the building.

Preference for providing in-person related services will be given for students who exhibit the most significant needs. In these cases, parents will need to commit to transporting their child to and from related service sessions. Flexibility in scheduling options will be limited.

Q: Will services be implemented consistent with what is indicated on the IEP or 504 Plan?

A: The district is required to provide a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). To that end, services will be implemented with consistency to the greatest extent possible.

Certain adjustments may be necessary in order to comply with the health/safety requirements during in-person instruction, and/or in consideration of contextual differences associated with remote instruction. A Contingency Plan will be developed for each student with an IEP or 504 that identifies any necessary adjustments to services or accommodations during in-person and/or remote instruction. Those plans will be developed by the student's special education teacher(s) and/or therapist(s), in conjunction with parents, within the first few weeks of school.

Q: How will parents of students with an IEP be informed of their child's progress?

A: The child's special education teacher or therapist will maintain regular communication through either email, phone calls, and/or tele-conferencing. This will allow collaborative communication to occur. In addition, students' IEP goals will continue to be progress monitored and communicated to parents consistent with the report card schedule.

Q: How many days of in-person instruction will be offered for students in the SPARK and AIM programs?

A: For students who receive special class instruction through Vestal (i.e. SPARK or AIM), in-person instruction will be offered more frequently:

Elementary Level

SPARK 8:1:1: In-person instruction for the SPARK 8:1:1 program will begin the year at 4 days a week on a half-day schedule, following a two-cohort (A-B) model. (Ex: Cohort A will attend in AM; Cohort B will attend in PM).

AIM 12:1:1: In-person instruction for the elementary AIM 12:1:1 program will be 4 days a week on a half-day schedule, following a two cohort (A-B) model. (Ex: Cohort A will attend in AM; Cohort B will attend in PM).

Middle School Level

AIM 12:1:1: In-person instruction for the middle school AIM 12:1:1 program will be 2 days a week.

High School Level

AIM 12:1:1: In-person instruction for students at the high-school who have **four or more courses** in the high school AIM 12:1:1 program will be 3 days/week.

Students taking **three or less courses** in the AIM 12:1:1 program will attend in-person consistent with their grade-level peers.

Q: How will students' needs be met who have an IEP or 504, and are not in the SPARK or AIM programs?

A: All students can elect either the hybrid or remote instruction learning model consistent with their grade level peers. Any special education services or accommodations consistent with the student's IEP or 504 Plan that need to be provided during instruction (either in-person or remote) will continue to occur. If the circumstances of remote instruction require changes of accommodations (i.e. aide support, preferential seating), those changes will be communicated via the Contingency Plan.

Q: How will the district conduct evaluations for students who are referred to the CSE?

A: In-person evaluations are preferred and will be scheduled whenever possible. However, remote evaluations may need to occur when necessary and appropriate, and would subsequently be scheduled with parent consent.

Q: How will you address the needs of students who require hand-over-hand assistance?

A: We recognize that some students require physical support, including toileting and/or hand over hand assistance. We will ensure that all our students' needs are met while engaging in appropriate health and safety protocols to the greatest extent possible. To this end, 6 feet social distancing may not always be possible. When necessary, staff will utilize additional PPE (face shields, gowns, gloves) to minimize exposure.

Q: Will children with special needs be required to wear a mask while in school? What if a child has a medical diagnosis that prohibits mask wearing?

A: All students are required to wear face-coverings when in-person. If a medical condition prohibits the child's use of a face-covering, medical documentation will be required.

Q: Will students with disabilities who are unable to wear masks still be able to participate in in-person instruction?

A: Unless a student has medical documentation excusing their use of a face covering, students are required to wear masks at all times except during designated “mask breaks”. Students with a medical exemption from wearing a face-covering are still able to participate in-person. In these cases, other measures of safety precautions will include: 6-foot social distancing (where-ever possible), frequent hand washing, regular disinfecting of materials, and unlimited access to hand sanitizer. Staff will be required to maintain mask-wearing whenever in-person with students. Face shields for staff will also be available for additional precaution.

Q: If remote instruction is not working well for my child with disabilities, can I switch to in-person instruction?

A: At the elementary level, parents will have the ability to reevaluate their child’s needs and change their instructional model after 10 weeks. At the middle and high school levels, students will have the option to change models at the mid-year break beginning February 1. If concerns exist at any time about a student’s instructional model, they should be communicated to the building administrator.

Q: How will the district address the speech and language and ENL needs of students while wearing masks?

A: The District is purchasing clear face coverings for use amongst students and staff whose needs depend on interpretation of facial cues.

Q: What opportunities for in-person instruction will children have if they attend a BOCES special education program?

A: At this time, most center-based BOCES programs will allow for in-person instruction 5 days a week. Vestal students enrolled in those programs will have the same opportunities to participate in 5-days a week of in-person instruction. The following center-based programs will include in-person instruction 5-days/week:

- PALS 8:1+1 and 12:1+1
- MOVE 12:1+4
- 12:1+1 Project Search
- Oak Tree – Center-based 8:1+1
- 6:1+1 Reclaim
- Crossroads – 8:1+1 (ELC/WLC locations)

*At this time, Futures – 12:1+1 (ELC/WLC locations) program will allow for in-person instruction consistent with what is being offered by the home-district. For Vestal students in the Futures program, they will attend in-person 2x/week.

Frequency of in-person instruction for **district-based** BOCES programs will depend on the host-district. Host districts outside of Vestal (i.e. U-E, Windsor, Harpursville) are currently offering in-person instruction for 5-days/week. Vestal students enrolled in those district-based programs will be able to participate at that same 5-day/week frequency. In Vestal, all district-based programs (i.e. Oaktree 8:1:1) will be 4 days a week. Opportunities for integration will be limited and will depend on in-person class sizes.

Q: Will remote related services sessions be offered in group format, and if so, how will my child's privacy be ensured?

A: Tele-therapy or tele-practice services may be offered in either individual or group format for either related therapies (i.e. OT, PT, Speech) or special instruction (i.e. Resource Room, Special Class). If group services are offered, parents will be notified in advance. A Tele-practice Protocol for Students/Families outlining the expectations for participating in group services will be provided to all families whose children will participate in group teletherapy or tele-practice.

ATHLETICS and CO-CURRICULARS

Q: If a student chooses the virtual option, will s/he be able to participate in extracurricular activities such as sports?

A: Students WILL have full eligibility for sports if they choose the full remote option.

TECHNOLOGY

Q: How is the district addressing the many connectivity, hardware and software issues that were experienced in the spring?

A: The District will be providing Chromebooks to students in grades 2 -12 to ensure each student has access to a device. This one-to-one concept will require students to bring the Chromebook back and forth between school and home. Some students may choose to bring their own device to school and not receive a District-issued Chromebook.

Students in grades K and 1 will be receiving iPads to use at home and in school.

The District is committed to the utilization of Google Classroom as a standard platform that our teachers, students, and administrators will be utilizing. Furthermore, an extensive study of all of the District software has resulted in defined software applications connected with various aspects of the curriculum. Moreover, our teachers were given the opportunity to participate in summer professional development in areas that support remote learning. Teachers will also receive more professional development during the days prior to the first day of school (September 14, 2020).

The District will maintain wifi access from the parking lot at the Central Office Building and within the African Road Auditorium parking lot. Additionally, for families of need, the District will make hot spots available (limited quantities).

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Q: How will the District be handling non-compliance issues of mask wearing and social distancing?

A: Wearing a face covering (mask) is a requirement. Thus, the schools will follow the code of conduct when working with students who are non-compliant.

Q: Please describe how mask exemptions will be reviewed, approved, and communicated. Parents deserve to know if there are students or staff not wearing masks in their children's classroom.

A: Only written documentation from a healthcare provider will exempt students or staff from wearing face coverings (masks) in schools. We will follow all HIPPA, FERPA, and Department of Health guidance.

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.

Q: Will students and teachers/aides that have exceptions from face coverings be grouped separately from those that are wearing face coverings? Will parents be informed if a student or adult in the room that their child is in, is not wearing a face covering?

A: Only written documentation from a healthcare provider will exempt students or staff from wearing face coverings (masks) in schools. We will follow all HIPPA, FERPA and Department of Health guidance when considering groupings of students and communication.

Q: How will the school monitor that staff and students are wearing masks? And what will the repercussions be if either is found not to be complying?

A: Wearing a face covering (mask) is a requirement. Thus, the schools will follow the code of conduct when working with students who are non-compliant. Likewise, non-compliant personnel issues will be handled utilizing District procedures.

Q: Will students be able to take their masks off if they are able to maintain a 6 foot distance? This concerns me greatly as once you start with 6 feet, it becomes 5, 4, 3, and then? I realize they will have to eat without masks but what are the other areas that you see students being able to take masks off while in school?

A: Wearing a face covering (mask) is a requirement. Mask breaks will be permitted in classrooms when students are sitting and practicing social distancing. Prior to moving about the classroom or exiting the classroom, students and staff must wear a face covering.

Q: How will the District be handling the myriad of illnesses that will arise as normal every school year?

A: Vestal Central School District employs at least one nurse in each school building. Students or staff feeling ill will report to the health office to be assessed. The nurse will follow up with parents as needed.

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

A: During sub-committee meetings, both the high school and middle school discussed the possibility of teachers traveling from classroom to classroom instead of students. The focus was to limit exposure of students in large gathering areas such as hallways. Unfortunately, the high school ran into a scheduling problem and could not manipulate the master schedule in such a way to allow students to stay in one classroom for most of the day. The middle school utilizes

teaming. Thus, core classes are grouped together in the building based on the team. This configuration allows staff to more easily move from classroom to classroom. Additionally, many high school courses are not grade specific, thus various grade levels of students are typically enrolled in courses. The high school will attempt to schedule teachers moving from classroom to classroom as much as possible.

Q: How is it logical or safer to expose children to another, or even multiple, groups of children and situations and then have them return to the classroom instead of keeping them with the same group of children in school 5 days/week?

A: We are implementing all the health and safety protocols possible. Our goal is to keep students and staff safe. Thus, our four-cohort model for grades 3-12 will reduce the density of students in the buildings to limit risk.

Q: What needs to happen to get more in-person days? Will this be evaluated after each semester?

A: The District will monitor district, regional and state confirmed cases of COVID-19. The District will also assess our implementations of protocols and procedures for cleaning and disinfecting to ensure we are meeting our goal of keeping students and staff safe. The District's goal is to move to Phase 3 (K-12) as soon as conditions allow.

Q: How does the abatement of statewide COVID cases and the removal of interstate travel restrictions have any bearing on our District's plan?

A: The District will utilize data from statewide, regional, and district COVID-19 cases to inform our approach to moving between phases. Additionally, a removal of interstate travel restrictions by the NYS Travel Advisory will provide valuable informational data to assist with decisions of moving between phases in our reopening plan. (Please note that interstate travel restrictions are only one of many factors being considered.)

Q: Please describe how social distancing outside of school hours and travel out of state for students and staff will be tracked. Please include "Have you traveled out of state?" as a question on the daily Health Assessment for parents and staff to complete.

A: The District's daily screening questionnaire contains the question, "Have you traveled internationally or from a state with widespread community transmission of COVID-19 per the New York State Travel Advisory?". Additionally, NYS and local health departments have implemented monitoring and movement restrictions of persons. Please see the [NYS Travel Advisory](#) link.

Q: Will there be any type of in-person screening (i.e. temperature checks) for students attending in-person or is the District relying on families to do that?

A: Screening will take place at home. The District is working on the implementation of an electronic screening application for students and staff. Students that have not been screened at home and wish to enter a school building will need to be screened by one of our school nurses.

Q: Please describe

- The procedure for notifying parents about an exposure - how, when, what method, level of information, etc.
- What defines an exposure
- What kind of exposure would need to occur to shut down 1) a pod, 2) a class, 3) a school, as well as what kind of information will be shared with parents.
- The requirements for returning to school after an exposure.
- The

procedure for switching learning methods for students experiencing an exposure or positive COVID test.

A: The Department of Health has full authority over a COVID exposure situation. The District will be under the guidance of the Broome County Health Department in any situation that involves a positive case of the COVID virus. Decisions and notifications of any COVID case will be handled through the Broome County Health Department, not the school district. The District will be notified of any decision of quarantines, closure plans, or reopening due to a COVID case. Changes impacting the operations within the District will be communicated to the public.

Q: Please describe partitioning/social distancing methods in the classrooms.

A: The District has identified maximum occupancy of classrooms to ensure social distancing. In some classrooms, furniture has been removed to allow the seating to be separated, meeting the requirements of social distancing. Other classrooms will require students to sit in assigned seating to meet the requirements of social distancing.

Q: Please describe how 12' of social distancing will be achieved for Music and Physical Education classes?

A: Our Athletic Director and K-12 Music Department Chairpersons were members of the reopening sub-committees.

Students in PE classes will utilize outdoor space and the full gymnasiums for any lesson that requires aerobic or heavy breathing. For example, a fitness lesson will require 12 feet distancing if students are not wearing a mask. However, an archery lesson will only require 6 feet distancing due to the lack of aerobic involvement.

Music lessons involving brass and woodwind (air) instruments and chorus lessons will require 12 feet distancing. This will be accomplished by scheduling students in low density sessions. However, a violin lesson, for example, will require 6 feet distancing.

Q: Please describe arrival, dismissal, restroom, lunch, and recess procedures that ensure social distancing.

A: Our morning school buses will dismiss students at school at a pace that will allow for social distancing. Our schools will welcome students and move them along to homerooms or first period classrooms. Dismissal may involve staggered dismissal times to allow for social distancing. While in the lunchroom, students will need to sit 6 feet apart while eating. Recess times will be staggered to accommodate a lower density of students on the playground at any given time. Restrooms will be cleaned throughout the day.

Q: Do the building HVAC systems meet current standards for particulate filtration?

A: Every filter in the District has been changed. The quality of filters has been upgraded as high as possible to improve air quality. Additionally, all of our buildings are exceeding the standard for fresh air exchanges in a room.

Q: Please describe how, with what and by whom classrooms and common areas will be cleaned during the day, at the end of the school day, and/or between cohort days.

A: Our school buildings will be cleaned and sanitized nightly regardless of the model. Cleaning supplies and disinfectant will be made available for classroom use.

TRANSPORTATION

Q: How will social distancing and mask wearing be monitored and enforced on school buses?

A: School bus drivers will utilize assigned seating on the buses. Students are required to wear a face covering (mask) while on the bus. If a student needs a mask, one will be provided. Students will sit one to a seat, against the window. Siblings or same household students may sit together in a seat. Assigned seats will begin at the back of the bus and work forward. Upon arrival at school in the morning, students will disembark the bus at a pace to practice social distancing. The driver will monitor students and address situations that involve students not wearing a face covering. The code of conduct will be utilized in these situations.

DISTRICT

Q: Why were the board members not required to sit on at least one reopening committee?

A: Board members were invited to sit in on the committees. A number of members were able to dedicate some of their personal time to do so. Their participation and input was appreciated.

Q: How were members of the reopening committees chosen?

A: The District built its steering committee and sub committees, tasked with planning our schools reopening, with individuals bringing a variety of perspectives to the table. The District reached out to those individuals (students, parents, teachers, school nurses, administrators, school meal coordinators, school board members, student club advisors, school bus drivers/monitors, custodians, and librarians), along with BOCES technology experts, a local doctor, and a Broome County Health Department representative. These individuals were identified as leaders amongst their peers. These individuals were asked if they would volunteer their time and efforts to be part of the committee(s).

Q: Shouldn't all stakeholders have been represented on these committees and offered a voice?

A: An effort was made to have various representatives of the District as part of the committees. As mentioned, the identified individuals are recognized as leaders of the various groups comprising the membership of the committees.

Q: Why is the BOE meeting occurring on YouTube rather than in a forum where parent/community participation can happen?

A: The Board meetings have consistently used the ZOOM meeting format, along with YouTube, for all virtual meetings, beginning with school closure in the Spring.

Q: Why are some stakeholders being given 100% consideration when others- the most important, and the entire reason for the district, our students- are given little to none?

A: There are numerous factors taken into account by the committees in planning for the reopening. Surveys were one method of collecting data for consideration. Also taken into consideration were

the numerous requirements put forth by the New York State Health Department (DOH), New York State Education Department (SED), and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Other factors taken into consideration included, but were not limited to, staffing levels, cleaning requirements, social distancing, busing schedules, etc..

Q: Why can't we have conversations with school officials rather than Q&A's?

A: We understand the frustration that some families must be experiencing. We value the input we have received from students, parents, and other stakeholders who comprise our reopening planning committees. Furthermore, we elicited feedback from school parents in our school community. This was accomplished via various School Messenger surveys. The District provided a special email address for stakeholders to ask and have their questions answered. The answers are also posted on our Reopening School web page as a FAQs section that is continuously updated. Currently, public information sessions are being conducted as Zoom webinars. (The first of these took place on August 10.) While we would love to hear from and converse with every parent, it is simply not possible to have one-on-one conversations with every family in the District. This is a unique situation, and we are balancing communicating with our stakeholders at the same time we are working very hard to set up safety protocols and procedures.