



Frequently Asked Questions

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1. Do students have to wear masks (face coverings)?

The expectation is that all students, employees, and adult visitors wear a cloth face covering at all times while also maintaining social distancing. We recognize that students will need supervised opportunities to remove their face coverings, and such breaks will be regularly provided. These breaks will adhere to health requirements for social distancing.

A face shield is not a mask and can only be worn with a face covering. The District will maintain adequate supplies of cloth face coverings for school staff and students who forget to bring their masks to school.

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.

3. Why are there four phases?

The Vestal School District elected to use four phases to present the different stages of instruction under the COVID-19 health emergency. We cannot lose sight of the possibility that a school or the District will need to close suddenly if there is an escalation of COVID-19 cases among students and staff in the District or regionally. If this were to occur, students would return to Phase 1, or remote learning, such as we experienced in March 2020 with the closing of schools.

Remote	Hybrid	Hybrid	In-Person
PHASE 1	PHASE 2	PHASE 3	PHASE 4
Full remote instruction and learning for students who do not participate in Hybrid Learning	Hybrid Instruction: Limited in-person instruction with remote learning Consists of 4 Cohorts (A, B, C & D) one day/week	Hybrid Instruction: Expanded in-person instruction with remote learning 2 Cohorts (A/C and B/D) two days/week	Full in-person instruction
The School Year will start for all students on Monday, September 14, in one of three ways:			
Students not participating in in-person or hybrid learning	Grades 3 – 12	Kindergarten and Grades 1 - 2	

Phase 2 enables the District to significantly reduce student density in order to establish the protocols and practices necessary for full compliance with the State’s COVID-19 health and safety guidance. The year is beginning in Phase 2 for students in grades 3 through 12 with one day of instruction per week for families who elect the hybrid model. Families may choose to remain in Phase 1 or remote learning. Once the District has gathered information from each family as to their intention for the first half of the school year, the cohort models will be developed and communicated.

Phase 3 provides two days of instruction for students in kindergarten and first and second grades. These primary students cannot work independently the way older students can. The focus of these two days of attendance will be direct instruction in reading, writing, and mathematics. Primary students who remain in Phase 1 and receive remote learning will receive similar instruction, but will not have the same level of guidance from his or her teacher because of the remote setting.

Phase 4 reminds us that the goal of all safety practices is to stabilize this health emergency and restore education to what it was prior to the closing of school in March 2020. The District is committed to a conservative model that protects students, staff, and their families and sets the instructional foundation for full reopening.

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

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, and
- the District's capacity to accommodate larger groups while maintaining rigorous health and safety protocols in the schools and on the buses.

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

5. What will remote learning look like for Vestal students?

Students in grades K through 12 who participate in remote learning will receive instruction that is structured in the same ways as their peers who are participating in hybrid learning. At this time, the District is determining the number of students who will be included in the remote learning cohorts. Families will be contacted the week of August 10th to provide specific information on their choice of remote or hybrid instruction for the fall semester. **More specific schedules and details will be provided once the District establishes the cohort groups at each level.**

The District's tentative plan is to assign students engaged in remote learning to a separate cohort that would follow a student's daily schedule in a manner similar to students attending in person. Teachers will be assigned to these cohorts and will offer a combination of "synchronous" instruction delivered in real-time through video-conferencing or Google classroom, and "asynchronous" instruction through the design and supervision of activities, individual and group online projects, and independent work. In all cases, students will receive feedback. Additionally, students receiving special education services will have access to special education faculty. Special education faculty will be collaborating with a student's course or classroom instructor to ensure that access to curriculum is well supported.

In both remote and hybrid learning, the expectation is that the one day of instruction will provide directions, strategies, and feedback to guide students on the days when they are working independently at home. Remote sessions will also be established throughout the week, especially on Wednesdays, to provide students with individual and group instruction, feedback, and assistance.

At this time, the plan for remote learning is contingent on the distribution of staff and students based on the choices families make between hybrid and remote learning. The questionnaire families complete will provide the District with a baseline to establish hybrid and remote cohorts and develop a faculty and team schedule.

6. What will hybrid learning look like for Vestal students?

Hybrid learning provides students and teachers an opportunity to interact directly in small groups. At all grade levels, small cohorts of 5 to 8 students will ensure individualized attention. Small cohorts also ensure that social distancing can be effectively practiced in the classroom and throughout the school, allowing students adequate space to engage with their peers and teachers.

Last June, parents and teachers expressed concerns that with the start of the new year, teachers and students would not have the advantage of knowing each other if schools were to start remotely. In grades 3 - 12, the one day of instruction will be an opportunity for teachers to respond in real time to individual students in small group settings. The in-person days will set the stage for the work students will do independently or through remote engagement with his or her classmates and teachers by way of Google Classroom, Zoom, and similar digital media. The days students are not in attendance will be a blend of both independent “offline” work and engagement with teachers and peers through conferencing and collaborative projects. Teachers will adhere to the students’ course schedules when setting up remote group sessions. When students are working remotely, however, it will not follow the same period schedule of the in-person day because their teacher will be working with the other cohort groups.

In grades kindergarten, first, and second, the two days of in-person instruction are necessary because these primary aged students do not yet have the skills to access digital media independently. The expectation is that on these two days, students will receive their core instruction in reading, writing, math, science and social studies intensively. They will also be trained in the District’s digital platforms that include Google Classroom, See Saw and Raz-Kids. The days students are not in-person will be structured for follow-up activities such as reading, writing, and math. Teachers will monitor students remotely on these days, but will not provide direct instruction as they would on an in-person day because they will be attending to the other class cohorts in-person. The decision to focus on grades K-1-2 for two days of instruction is rooted in the District’s primary literacy program which is taught most effectively through direct, personalized instruction. For students who choose remote instruction only, our faculty will work carefully to provide that instruction through remote methods as best as possible.