

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

9/2/2020

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.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Q: How will quizzing/testing be handled? Will tests and quizzes only be given on the days of in-person learning? How will it be ensured that cheating is not occurring?

A: The development of assessments will be carefully monitored at the classroom, building, and district levels. Hybrid and remote models of instruction will require a greater emphasis on authentic assessments that require answers unique to students by way of written responses rather than direct correct/incorrect responses. Parents will need to be more closely involved in monitoring student work to ensure their students are completing it on their own. Work submission will need to occur in person on in-person days, and remotely through learning platforms such as Google Classroom and SeeSaw.

Q: How is the system of assessment and grading for the students going to be fair?

A: All systems of assessment require coordination among grade-level and department teams. The systems of assessment used during hybrid and remote models will adhere to the same standards that existed prior to the emergency closure of schools.

Q: Will the schools facilitate more communication with parents (group or individualized) regarding curriculum, how to support students' learning (especially younger students), and expectations and accountability around skill/knowledge achievement? When?

A: The schools will maintain communication with families at the building level through principal and teacher communications. This will occur on a regular basis.

Q: There are many references to "Independent Learning" in the Reopening Plan. What does this mean? And how will the burden on parents be alleviated more than it was in the Spring?

A: Students will be expected to complete assigned work at home during times when they are not engaged in lessons with their teachers and classmates or attending in person. Parents will need to assist and supervise students in work completion as they typically would if it were homework such as existed prior to school closure.

Q: How will consistency between teachers be ensured?

A: At the elementary level, principals and teachers coordinate lessons with district scope and sequences in the areas of ELA and mathematics. Such scope and sequences existed prior to the emergency closure of school and will be modified and adjusted to accommodate the pacing and structures of remote and hybrid learning environments.

Q: Will remote learning be synchronous or asynchronous? Will teachers be live streaming classrooms?

A: Remote learning will be both synchronous and asynchronous. The District will use Zoom video conferencing to engage in synchronous activities.

Q: For grades 9-12, would the in-person learning day be structured around the subject's needs (hands-on vs not, e.g. 4 periods of Chemistry Lab, 4 periods of Ceramics etc.) or will the students be following a regular 9 period daily schedule?

A: Students will be following the 9-period schedule for the day.

Q: Will all teachers be expected to provide detailed notes and lectures? Last Spring, several teachers had a "here are some labs, figure it out yourself" model which was not sufficient for students who are more in-person, hands-on learners.

A: Coordination of notes and lectures will occur at the department and course level.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

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 – UPDATES

SPARK 8:1:1: In-person instruction for the SPARK 8:1:1 program will now be offered 4 days week (M, T, Th, F) for an extended half-day. Students will remain through lunch and end their day in the early afternoon. This will be offered for all students choosing the in-person model.

AIM 12:1:1: In-person instruction for the AIM 12:1:1 program will now be offered 4 days week (M, T, Th, F) for an extended half-day. Students will remain through lunch and end their day in the early afternoon. This will be offered for all students choosing the in-person model.

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 a 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.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Q: What is the rationale for requiring students to stay inside during lunch?

A: Students will be expected to remain in the school building for lunch breaks. This will minimize the exposure of students coming back into the buildings. It will eliminate the need for further screening and tracking of students in the middle of the day.

Q: Explain the rationale in allowing students not wearing masks due to a medical exemption in a classroom with other students.

A: The district follows the guidelines for mask wearing as provided by the Department of Health. They are the lead authorization in the accepted protocols for health-related matters. If the student cannot wear a mask, then social distancing (6 feet) must be followed.

Q: If a family does not want their child to be in a class that allows masks to be removed, or gym that allows masks to be removed, how will that be handled?

A: The district follows the Department of Health guidance on the proper protocol for mask wearing. In a situation where a student cannot wear a mask, then social distancing (6 feet) must be followed. Steps will be taken by the district (Administration/Teachers) to keep social distancing in place during these situations.

Q: How many students will be allowed in each classroom?

A: The classrooms will be measured for the maximum number of students/teachers allowed under the social distancing guidelines.

ATHLETICS and CO-CURRICULARS

Q: Will there be Fall sports?

A: As of 8/16, Fall sports will begin on 9/21. Registration begins on 8/21 on FamilyID. The link is on the athletic website.

Q: What do we do about student sports physicals?

A: Physicals that were valid last year will remain valid for this coming Fall season. NYS waived the physical requirement for the Fall 2020 season.

Q: Will students that are homeschooled be eligible to participate in school athletics?

A: Guidance (Aug. 10, 2020) on this issue is covered in The New York State Education Department regulations: 135.4 Physical Education. This regulation provides a student with the opportunity to participate in interscholastic athletics if they are receiving credit for three courses and physical education, regardless of the education platform utilized by the school district (i.e. remote only, hybrid, etc.).