



The Village School of North Bennington
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July 24, 2020

Dear K-6 Families:

We have been thinking hard and carefully about the school year and our reopening plans, and we understand this is a central concern for all of you. We are fortunate to live in a state that has managed to keep the number of COVID-19 cases at a low level. At this time, barring a stay-at-home order from the governor, we are planning to return to school for in-person instruction with enhanced physical distancing. To open school successfully, we will need to work in partnership with you and be as flexible as possible throughout the year in adapting to and changing our models of learning in response to the virus.

In making the decision to reopen our school, we are following the data and recommendations that show if we can do it safely, it's the very best option for our kids socially and emotionally and academically, as well as for families. The Village School is following the guidance of the Vermont Agency of Education's (AOE) "[A Strong and Healthy Start](#)" released on June 17, 2020 (and updated on July 17, 2020). The guidance was developed by Education Secretary Daniel French, Health Commissioner Dr. Mark Levine, and a panel of 17 educators, pediatricians, psychologists, and state officials. It lays out the framework for a fall return with social distancing and precautions in place, and regular screening of students and staff for coronavirus.

The guidance lays out three tiers for operation, with Phase 1 being online instruction, Phase 2 being in-person instruction with enhanced physical distancing, and Phase 3 providing in-person instruction with distancing measures (as shown on the [flow chart on our school's website](#)).

The Village School plans to open in Phase 2 with either of the following models:

- a.) A hybrid model in which students will be split into two cohorts with two days in school, two days distance learning, and everyone distance learning for one day; or,
- b.) A cohorting model in which everyone will be in school at the same time, all day and cohorting, with enhanced physical distancing four days a week, and a fifth day of distance learning for all students. Off-campus classroom extension sites may be utilized around the Village.

Please note in either model, the school expects to have one day a week of distance learning only for everyone.

If the option of in-person learning is not medically advised or does not feel safe for a student or family, we will have a distance learning only option—and this will be made available at registration.

We encourage you to consider this option if you are not comfortable sending your student to school at the start of the year.

Knowing that distance learning will be a part of all students' experience, the faculty and staff are using the summer for professional development around e-learning and to refine their distance learning curriculum and plans. Distance learning will not look the same as emergency distance learning did last spring, nor will it look the same as in-school learning. Our school will be prepared to move quickly and confidently to distance learning in response to changing COVID-19 guidance or a future outbreak of the virus.

We take the physical health and wellbeing of students and our community very seriously. In order to open school safely in-person, we are following rules and guidance from the AOE, the Vermont Department of Health, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and Vermont's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (VOSHA). Some of these measures include:

- Handwashing and/or hand sanitizing for all students and staff will be required periodically throughout the day.
- All students and staff will be required to wear facial coverings at school. We currently have purchased enough clear face shields to issue a face shield to every student at the start of the year and prefer to use this form of facial covering, but students also will be permitted to bring their own masks if a cloth face covering is preferred.
- Daily health screening questions and temperature checks will be required for all students and staff before they enter the school building. The school building will be open at 7:45 a.m. to allow more time for these checks.
- K-6 students will stay with their cohorts all day, even during recess. Students will eat breakfast and lunch in their classrooms.
- Students and staff will do their best to adhere to the physical distancing guidelines.
- Regular deep cleaning and disinfection of the building will be in adherence to current CDC and VOSHA standards.

Additionally, please bear in mind these important logistical changes:

- Arrival will start at 7:45 a.m., classes will begin at 8:15 a.m., and dismissal will be at 3 p.m.
- No family members or visitors will be allowed in the school building.
- We will be unable to offer Before or After Care service this year.

While school will, no doubt, look different this year and there will be new procedures and routines in place, we are working thoughtfully to make our environment and messaging to students welcoming and friendly, and to do our best to support everyone's needs as best as possible and in developmentally appropriate ways. Our priorities will continue to be the health and social-emotional wellness of the community and a substantive and high-quality educational program. We will also leverage outdoor opportunities whenever possible to create social distance and enhance student and staff wellbeing.

We realize you will have many additional questions around what school will look like. Your input is important to us and to our planning. For this reason, **we are holding two Village School virtual meetings next week on Tuesday, July 28, at 7 p.m. and on Wednesday, July 29, at 9 a.m.** Families will be sent an invitation with the meeting links ahead of time. If you cannot attend one of these discussions, or if you have any questions, please contact me at tnewbold@vsnb.org or 802-442-5955 ext. 201.

At this time, we expect registration to open on August 7, and school to start on Wednesday, September 2. As we move forward and have additional details to share, we will continue to communicate our plans to you. Thank you for your patience and understanding as we work to balance the many essential factors that are going into the decisions we are making to support students, families, and staff in these extraordinary times.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tim Newbold". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the beginning.

Tim Newbold
Head of School

P.S. - The state guidance for PreK has some differences, and we are coming up with a slightly different plan that will be forthcoming.

P.S.S. - Additionally, we understand that students on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and students of Essential Workers may have extenuating circumstances. We are working on plans that may better suit their needs.