

While there are many discussions to be held and decisions to be made given the recent change in State COVID metrics, the Vernonia School District does now have the opportunity to bring elementary students back on campus.

School Administration, the School Board and Teachers have been working on plans for returning students to on-site learning, as soon as it can be done safely, and still stay within State guidelines.

Kindergarten through 5th grade students are now able to attend school on-site if county COVID rates are less than 100 cases/100,000 residents over a two-week time period. Prior to last week's reports, Columbia County's numbers were well within this range. At press time the last two-week report showed Columbia County with 98.6 cases/100,000 residents, just barely within the standards.

The District will be watching these numbers and all final decisions will be within these guidelines.

If Columbia County COVID numbers remain in acceptable levels, the bullet points below share the basic plan for moving forward with On-site K-5 instruction in the Vernonia School District. This plan received Board approval at the November 12 meeting:

- All students in grades K-5 currently in Comprehensive Distance Learning (CDL) can return to on-site learning when metrics allow, and staff have fully planned for the transition.
- Students in grades K-2 at Mist and Vernonia Elementary Schools will have the opportunity to start attending on-site classes on Monday, January 11.
- Students in grades 3-5 at Mist and Vernonia Elementary Schools will have the opportunity to start attending on-site classes following the end of second quarter, on Monday, February 8.
- Return to school will likely be on a shorter, on-site school-day schedule to be announced.
- Having K-2 classes start on January 11, a full week after Winter Break, will provide teachers time for health and safety training, as well as transition activities and planning prior to the return of students. A revised schedule will be provided to parents as we get closer to those dates.
- Students in Vernonia Middle and High Schools will continue their CDL until further notice. As success with bringing in elementary students is realized, and numbers remain within the guidelines, we will work to develop timelines for returning MS and HS students to campus as well.
- Regardless of on-site instruction availability, parents will still have the option to keep their student in Comprehensive Distance Learning and not have them return to on-site learning at this time.

If COVID numbers rise above the limits, this plan will be placed on hold, and the district will determine the next potential start date for On-site K-2, and then 3-5, instruction.

As we move forward with having students return to On-site instruction, we will continue to follow County numbers and evaluate the impact of our on-site instruction on local COVID numbers as well. This will help us determine continuation of on-site learning, and to consider when Middle School and High School students will return to join our elementary students in hybrid, on-site instruction.

In order for this to happen we as a community must solidify our health and safety measures. If we are going to have our students return to school, and then be able to keep them there, it will take all of us being vigilant with hand washing, social distancing and the wearing of masks. Even if you don't like them, please wear a mask. If we want our kids to be back at school, we have to take the safety precautions to make it happen. Please and thank you!