

**From:** John Black  
**Sent:** Saturday, August 01, 2020 1:44 PM  
**Subject:** VPS update for Middle School families

### **Middle School Families:**

I hope this email finds everyone well and enjoying the weekend!

As a follow-up to my emails of July 22, 20, and 18 (see below) ...

Many thanks to those of you who have reached-out to Mr. Schutz or I with questions about Middle School. I have also enjoyed meeting and zooming with some families throughout the Summer!

Please review the most updated information below and, as always, feel free to email me with any questions or concerns. Mr. Schutz and I are also more than happy to continue meeting (or zooming) with families individually. In addition, all school families will continue to receive updates every Monday and Thursday. All of these updates are posted on our website ... in case you miss one.

First, please find attached the **Distance Learning Schedule** for Middle School. As noted in previous emails, our goal is to provide a **full-day** Distance Learning Program. But its also important to note that lesson-preparation for Distance Learning is considerably more time-intensive than regular on-campus learning. So, Mr. Schutz endeavored to solicit as much feedback from the Middle School teachers as possible, as he built the schedule. We may continue to make some modifications to the schedule in the coming week. But the basic format will not change. I would like to thank Mr. Schutz for his efforts with the DL-schedule, and also for his work in preparing our regular class schedule for on-campus learning. If and when we're allowed to open the campus, we'll be ready-to-go!

Second, as outlined in the emails below, we have made some changes to our **policies for Distance Learning (DL)**, based upon your feedback, as well as our own observations of the Spring DL-program. In short ...

- We had too many students not participating in zoom-sessions. Accordingly, teachers will track students' attendance at Zoom-sessions and will be able to downgrade a student's "effort" grade for non-attendance.
- Unlike the Spring, teachers will now be given the option of issuing "zeros" for failure to submit homework or classwork on-time. This would impact the student's "effort" grade.
- Music and Art will have "live" zoom sessions. Weekly assignments/projects will be reviewed & discussed during these zoom-sessions.
- Unlike the Spring, Mr. Schutz will now hold his Speech & Debate class weekly. But the elective-class will not be offered during Distance Learning.
- Technology with Mrs. Willis will not begin immediately, allowing her to focus on DL-training & support for teachers across the school.
- For 8th graders ... grades earned during Distance Learning will count towards their Honor Roll status for Trimester-1.

Third, please be reminded that we continue to implement **Standards-based Grading** across the school. Initially, we implemented the new grading scale (4,3,2,1) in Preschool thru 5th grade, and then expanded to 6th grade last school year. It will now be expanded further to 7th grade. Accordingly, only 8th grade will have A,B,C,D and GPA (which will be used to determine Honor Roll).

Fourth, as noted in previous emails to the community, the school has made various **staffing changes** as a result of our enrollment decline. In April, we developed a *10-point Plan for Financial Stability* which was shared with the community and posted on our website. It indicated that various staff positions would be designated as "dependent upon enrollment." Those staff members were informed in April and told that a final decision would be made in the late-Summer as the school's enrollment situation became clearer. The decision has since been made, and the community was subsequently informed (see previous emails below). The plan also indicated that additional staffing changes may be necessary. Based upon current enrollment (under 125), additional positions were recently designated as "dependent upon enrollment," and those staff members were informed accordingly. A final decision about these additional positions will be made in late August. With a few exceptions that mainly impact the lower grades, we have chosen not to eliminate positions, but rather reduce the hours of certain positions. This approach limits the impact on the students. The reduced hours may impact a staff member's "other" duties. But Mr. Schutz and I will need to properly compensate for this ... which I am confident we can do.

Fifth, **overnight trips** have always been an important component of our Middle School program. While we remain hopeful of offering trips in the Spring, current health conditions across the country obviously make this uncertain. Accordingly, we will not book any trips at this time, as it proved difficult to manage each vendor's refund policy last Spring. Additionally, the rescheduled trip on the Colorado River also remains uncertain. We hope to have further feedback from the vendor in the coming weeks.

Lastly, (as indicated in previous emails) the school has submitted a request for a waiver to the county Department of Public Health. Many thanks to those 34 families from across the school who provided "letters of support." If approved, the waiver would allow us to open for on-campus instruction for 1-8th (Preschool, PreKindergarten, and Kindergarten have already been granted permission by our Childcare Licensing agent). It's honestly impossible to give a timeline for approval (or denial) of the waiver. But it is quite **likely that we will begin the year (on August 13) with Distance Learning for all students in 1-8th.**

If we are granted a waiver and are allowed to open the campus for 1-8th, then we would offer the *Distance Learning Alternative Program (DLAP)*, an outline of which has been available on our website since June. Ultimately, **our goal is to provide families with two options: On-campus Learning OR Distance Learning.** Being able to offer both is in the best interest of families, as well as the school. We will certainly make adjustments to the DLAP based upon the number of students who are on-campus vs. at-home. As previously noted, the DLAP is not the same as the Distance Learning Program outlined on the attached schedule. But if a large number of families in a particular class opt to use the DLAP, then we'll certainly make modifications to ensure those students are being properly served.

In closing, I completely understand that a lot of information has been sent to you over the past month, and that the information seems to continually change. Ideally, a school wants to be a proactive as possible. But over the past few weeks, we have been forced to react to changing guidelines from State, County, and Local authorities. In all truth, this is likely to continue for much of the school year. It is my hope that all of our school families choose to remain with Valley Prep throughout these uncertain times. But not all will, for various reasons. Regrettably, a significant number of families across the school have already chosen to pull-out (hence dropping our enrollment to under 125). Regardless, the school will endeavor to continue serving all families to the greatest extent possible, always with the intent of maintaining the school's **academic rigor**, as well as its **familial sense of community**. Eventually, our enrollment will return to regular levels.

Please do not hesitate to reply with any questions or concerns. Mr. Schutz will be holding a **Zoom Orientation Meeting** with Middle School families on August 12 @ 11am. But as noted above, he and I are more than happy to meet (or zoom) with families individually before August 12. As always, we are available at your convenience.

**Best regards,**

**John Black, Head of School**  
**Mr. Schutz, Assistant Head of School**

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**From:** John Black  
**Sent:** Wednesday, July 22, 2020 4:30 PM  
**Subject:** VPS Distance Learning in 6-8th

### **VPS Middle School Families:**

As a follow-up to my email from earlier today (see below) ...

Some of you have reached-out with a few questions ... and I'm sure others may have the same questions.

1. **Is the schedule outlined on the attachment the "final" schedule for Middle School?** The attachment indicates a "sample" schedule for Distance Learning. Mr. Schutz continues to develop the schedule in collaboration with the other Middle School teachers. A finalized schedule will be distributed next week.
2. **Will the DL-program provide a full-day of instruction?** While most families were satisfied with the DL-program which was provided in the Spring, some felt there was insufficient zoom-time at some grade-levels. Accordingly, our goal (as stated on the attachment) is to provide a **full-day** of Distance Learning.

3. **Will Spanish, French, and Technology continue to be a part of the Specialist program?** I neglected to list them separately on the attachment when referencing the Specialist classes. But Mr. Schutz' schedule will most definitely include them.

Special thanks to Mr. Schutz for his work on our class schedules. He was in the midst of finalizing our on-campus schedule when the governor made his announcement last week about campus closures. Mr. Schutz then quickly transitioned to building our DL-schedule.

If you have any questions or concerns, please be sure to email me directly (jblack@vpredlands.org). I will always reply immediately.

I will be sending additional information to all VPS families in the coming days.

Enjoy your evening!

**John Black, Head of School**

**From:** John Black

**Sent:** Wednesday, July 22, 2020 6:31 AM

**Subject:** VPS update (DL & PS-PK)

VPS families:

As a follow-up to my email of July 20 (see below) ...

### **DISTANCE LEARNING (DL)**

As promised, please find attached our updated Distance Learning Plan which outlines enhancements to Zoom-time, attendance tracking, and grading policies. The attachment includes a "Sample Schedule" for the three grade sections (PS-PK; K-5; 6-8). The teachers will now begin developing their grade-specific schedule which will be distributed to families before DL-instruction begins. Our goal is to ensure a full-day of DL instruction.

In the coming days, I will be distributing our DL-calendar, including a date for Orientation Day and the 1st-day of instruction. Our goal will be to start on (or shortly after) August 11.

### **PRESCHOOL & PREKINDERGARTEN**

We are pleased to announce that we have been given permission by our Childcare Licensing agent to open our Preschool and PreKindergarten for on-campus instruction. For those families who are not yet ready to send their children back to campus, we will also be providing a Distance Learning alternative. Mrs. Johnson will be reaching-out to PS and PK families in the coming days to determine their preference: on-campus or DL. We will then determine an appropriate start-date for both programs, hopefully on (or shortly after) August 11.

### **WAIVER REQUESTED TO ALLOW ON-CAMPUS INSTRUCTION FOR K-8**

We have filed a waiver-request with the San Bernardino Department of Public Health (DPH). At the time of our filing, they had yet to receive instructions from the State regarding the procedure. We are hopeful of receiving feedback from them before the end of next week. If we are ultimately allowed to offer on-campus instruction, then families will be able to choose between on-campus instruction and our Distance Learning Alternative Program (the details of which are posted on our website). We would be hopeful of starting both programs on (or shortly after) August 11.

### **IF VPS DOES NOT RECEIVE THE WAIVER, WHEN WILL THE CAMPUS OPEN?**

If our waiver-request (to open the campus for K-8 instruction, despite the governor's announcement) is ultimately rejected by DPH, then we will begin our Distance Learning program as outlined above. It's difficult to say how long it will then be before schools in San Bernardino are allowed to re-open for on-campus instruction. The *Covid-19 Testing Positivity Rate* must be below 8%. Last Friday it was above 15%. It is now nearly 18%. Hence, the importance of requesting the waiver.

I will endeavor to update everyone again over the weekend about our DL-calendar and the status of our waiver-request with DPH.

**Take care**

**John Black, Head of School**

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**From:** John Black

**Sent:** Monday, July 20, 2020 6:32 AM

**Subject:** VPS plan for 2020-21

**VPS Families:**

I hope everyone enjoyed a nice weekend!

I'm sure the community has many questions about the start of the school year, following the governor's announcement on Friday. So, I'll do my best to outline the school's plans as we prepare for the 2020-21 school year.

In short, as we have been doing throughout the Summer, the school will continue preparing for two possible approaches-to-learning to begin the school year:

1. On-campus Learning
2. Distance Learning

### **1. Plan for on-campus learning ...**

Valley Prep continues to believe that in-person instruction is the best way for the children to learn. Most importantly, we continue to believe we can do so safely by following our *Campus Re-opening Plan* (first posted on our website in May). In addition, by offering our *Distance Learning Alternative Program* (DLAP) for those families who are not yet ready to send their children back to the campus, we were confident that our plans (prior to the governor's announcement) provided satisfactory options for families.

Accordingly, we will make three separate attempts to open our campus as originally planned. **(1)** Our accrediting agency (California Association of Independent Schools CAIS) is reviewing the governor's announcement and considering ways of appealing on behalf of independent schools state-wide. But we should probably expect that their appeal will be unsuccessful, considering the large number of such schools state-wide. **(2)** VPS will file a waiver-request with SB County Dept of Health this week. If the waiver is granted, we would be allowed to open the campus. But again, the request is a long-shot since so many private schools across the state will be taking the same approach. **(3)** We will request permission from our Childcare Licensing agent to open our Preschool and Pre-Kindergarten programs for on-campus learning, remembering that other childcare providers were allowed to operate during the Spring shut-down.

If one of these attempts to open the campus is ultimately successful, we will determine an appropriate start-date that allows teachers sufficient time to prepare.

If these three attempts to open our campus fail in the short-term, then we'll aim to begin our Distance Learning Program on August 11 (or shortly thereafter) and wait for SB County to be removed from the State's watch-list (and stay off the list for 14 consecutive days), at which point we can open our campus along with other schools across the county.

### **2. Plan for Distance Learning ...**

As noted above, if we are not able to open our campus on August 11, then we will aim to begin our Distance Learning Program for all grade-levels on that same day (or shortly thereafter). We would also schedule a Virtual

Orientation Day, along with a time for students to pick-up new textbooks, as needed.

Although VPS received many compliments about the DL-program we implemented in the Spring, we have, nonetheless, been working throughout the Summer to improve the program with respect to Zoom-time, attendance tracking, and grading policies. We will be distributing an outline of this updated plan in the coming days.

Additionally, some families have asked if the school can provide a lower tuition-rate during Distance Learning. Ideally, we would like to do so. But given our current enrollment-level, this would require a significant reduction to our staff, something that would likely degrade our program and cause other families to question the value of a VPS-education. That being said, the school has been able to nearly double the funds we have available for Tuition Assistance. Accordingly, please do not hesitate to contact Mrs. Johnson (kjohanson@vpredlands.org) to learn more about the application process.

### What's next?

- Later this week, we will update everyone on the status of our three attempts (see above) to open the campus, despite the governor's announcement. If we are allowed to open the campus, we would aim to do so on August 11 or shortly thereafter.
- Later this week, we will distribute our updated Distance Learning Program for your review. If our attempts to open the campus fail, we would begin our DL-program on August 11, or shortly thereafter. It would continue until SB-county schools are allowed to open their campuses.
- We suggest that families postpone their plans to purchase the items on our Supply List (posted on our website since early July) until further information about our campus re-opening becomes available. If we need to begin the year with Distance Learning, not all of the items on the Supply list will be needed.
- Please don't hesitate to apply for Tuition Assistance. Funds remain available.
- If you have not already done so, Enrollment Contracts should be submitted asap (please contact Mrs. Johnson with questions).

In closing, I understand the frustration and confusion that all of you are feeling. These are extremely challenging times. But we'll get through it ... by remaining positive and maintaining open-lines of communication. Accordingly, please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.

**Best regards,  
John Black, Head of School**

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**From:** John Black  
**Sent:** Saturday, July 18, 2020 6:41 AM  
**Subject:** CA.gov announcement and VPS

### VPS families

As a follow-up to my email from yesterday (see below) ...

Governor Newsom announced yesterday that in order for schools to resume on-campus instruction, the county in which the school operates must not appear on the state's COVID-19 "watch list" for 14 consecutive days. Unfortunately, San Bernardino County is one of the 33 counties currently on that list. To be removed from the list, a county must have a COVID-19 testing positivity rate of under 8%. As of July 17, San Bernardino is currently above 15%.

Accordingly, it appears likely that VPS will not be allowed to begin on-campus instruction on August 11, as planned.

However, we have contacted the California Association of Independent Schools CAIS (our accrediting agency) to confirm that the governor's announcement applies to CAIS-accredited independent schools, as well as public schools. We will update everyone once we receive confirmation, hopefully on Monday or Tuesday.

If we need to begin the school year with a school-wide Distance Learning Program (which, to be honest, seems quite likely), then we will distribute our updated DL-plan to families next week. As noted in yesterday's email, our August DL-program will be similar to the DL-program we implemented in Spring 2020 ... but with some important enhancements to Zoom-time, attendance tracking, and grading.

In closing, VPS remains committed to opening our campus ... and we will do so, once permission is granted.

We will update everyone again no later than Wednesday. Until then, please don't hesitate to email me with any questions or concerns ([jblack@vpredlands.org](mailto:jblack@vpredlands.org)). Hang-in there everyone! We'll figure this all out together.

Take care

John Black, Head of School