

Check out the June 2021 Newsletter!

See the online version at vvschool.ca/news-events/newsletter.



Learning Without Limits

We made it! It's been a long, hard year for everybody, but at long last we're at the month of June! Not only that, but COVID numbers are down, and with over half of all Albertans having had at least one vaccine dose, it does finally look like there's light at the end of the tunnel. Not a moment too soon!

June of course means our graduating class of 2021 will be taking a well-deserved bow in Vista Virtual School's first entirely online commencement ceremony on Friday, June 4. We look forward to hearing from class valedictorian Zachary Larsen (Congratulations Zachary!) and to wishing all our grads the absolute best as they head off on their respective paths. You've done us proud!

That said, our grade 12 students are not the only ones bidding a bittersweet adieu to VVS at the end of the 2020-2021 school year. After a 22 year at VVS and a total of 34 years with the Pembina Hills School Division, Mike Loitz will be stepping down as principal at the end of this month. You will soon have the opportunity to meet his successor, Steven Kaplan, who will be profiled in the next edition of this newsletter.

As always, we welcome your comments and feedback regarding this newsletter, or anything else. If you have any questions or concerns, please phone us toll-free at 1-855-974-5333 or talk with your teacher. If you have any VVS-related stories you'd like to share, here or on our website or social media platforms, please contact [Ben Freeland](#), our communications and marketing specialist.

Have a wonderful month of June!

Sincerely,



Mike Loitz,
Principal



Treena Bradbury,
Associate Principal



Frank McCallum,
Associate Principal

New This Month

Graduation Ceremony

It's nearly graduation time for our grade 12 students! For the first time ever, VVS is holding an entirely online graduation ceremony, which is being held via Zoom on Friday, June 4, 2021 starting at 6:30 pm. (The link will open at 6:00 pm.) The ceremony will be recorded and posted for later viewing on the VVS website.



All participating grads will be mailed a cap and tassel to wear during the ceremony. They will also be mailed a recognition certificate from Vista Virtual School. Please note that you do not receive your actual diploma at graduation. It will be mailed to you directly by Alberta Education once all your diploma requirements have been fulfilled.

Grads are expected to dress semi-formally for the evening. Some grads may opt for formal dresses and suits, but that is not an expectation. Because this year's graduation is a virtual event, you could even wear a semi-formal top, and sweatpants! You will be asked to wear the cap and tassel that you were mailed before the event.

For more information on graduation, please visit the [Grad 2021 page](#) on the VVS website or contact Miss Seward at Aletta.Seward@pembinahills.ca.

Student Awards

Every year, Vista Virtual School recognizes student accomplishments through an award ceremony. Some of these awards, including Honour Roll, Top Marks Awards, and Elective Honours, are automatically granted based on student grades, while others are awarded based on teacher nominations. Others still are open for students to nominate themselves. These include:

- The **Pembina Hills School Division Grade 12 Citizenship Award**, which recognizes two grade 12 students who have stood out for their demonstration of good citizenship. This award comes with a \$500 prize. The deadline for applications is **Wednesday, June 30**.
- The **Raju Family Distance Learning Award**, which recognizes full-time elementary, junior high, and senior high students who have demonstrated diligence in their distance learning as well as good citizenship. This award also comes with a financial prize. Students may nominate themselves or be nominated by a teacher. The deadline for applications is **Wednesday, June 30**.
- The **Alberta Teachers' Association (Sub-Local No. 22) Award**, an annual \$1,000 scholarship awarded to two graduating students. Applicants must have an overall academic record of at least 70 percent in all four core subjects. The deadline for applications is **Wednesday, June 30**.

For more information on student awards, including eligibility criteria, please visit the [awards page](#) on the VVS website.

Fall Registration

Registration for the 2021-2022 school year is now open. Fall registrations must be completed prior to September 17 for the school year starting September 1. We encourage everyone to register earlier rather than later.

Key dates for the coming school year are as follows:

- Grades 1-9: September 1, 2021 to June 15, 2022
- Grades 10-12, First semester: September 1, 2021 to January 15, 2022
- Grades 10-12, Second semester: February 1 to June 15, 2022
- Summer school: Dates TBD
- Open entry for Adults and International students



Our online application process has been upgraded from the previous year. Current students who are 18 years old (or their guardians if the student is not yet 18 years old) can submit an automatic application form and simply confirm information instead of entering all the same information over again. This feature will be available on the left-hand side of the parent portal, for which login information was recently provided.

If you have any other questions or concerns, please contact us at vsupport@pembinahills.ca.

Second Semester Dates at a Glance

June 15, 2021 – All second semester assignments/quizzes due (all grades)

June 22, 2021 – All second semester exams completed (all grades)

Summer 2021 Semester Dates at a Glance

June 15 – Deadline to register for 5-credit summer semester courses

July 2 – Deadline to withdraw from 5-credit summer semester courses

July 10 – Deadline to register for or withdraw from 1 or 3-credit summer semester courses

July 16 – Marks for summer semester courses start being reported, as courses are completed

August 6 – All summer semester course work completed

Alberta Education Survey

Do you, like many Albertans, have concerns about the government of Alberta's draft K-6 curriculum? If so, we encourage you to complete the government's [online survey](#) on the draft curriculum, which will remain open until the spring of 2022. You can further make your voice heard by writing a letter to your MLA, the education minister, and/or the premier expressing your concerns about the draft curriculum and other issues facing our educational system amid the pandemic.

Textbook Returns for Full-Time Students

Due to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, our physical campus in Calgary remains open by appointment

only. As such, we are accepting in-person textbook returns (by appointment). You may also return them by mail to our distribution centre in Calgary. Textbooks and other loaned materials can be mailed to the following address:

Vista Virtual School
341 58 Avenue SE
Calgary, AB T2H 0P3

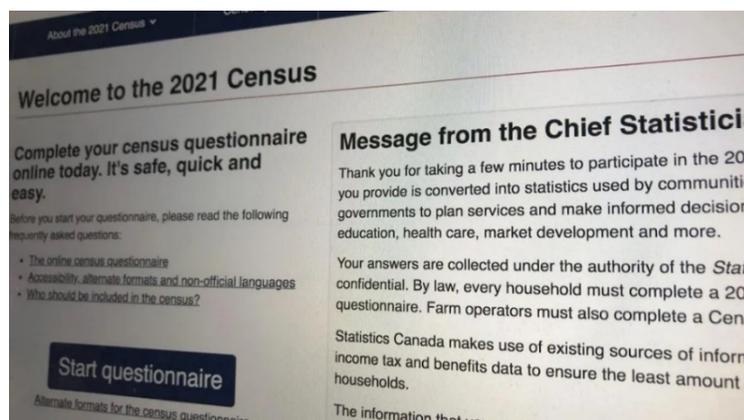
COVID Restrictions

All VVS support staff will continue to be working from home until further notice. The Calgary campus will remain open for exams and other business, but strictly by appointment. Those wishing to visit are required to book an appointment in advance, follow all Alberta Health Services guidelines, and to wear a mask.

Our phone line (1-855-974-5333 x5317) is being monitored but not answered in person, due to our support staff working from home. All voicemails are being redirected to the VV Support email inbox and are being responded to in the order in which they are received. Our support staff may respond to messages either by phone or email. All phone numbers and extensions remain the same unless otherwise noted.

It's Census Time

Canada's 2021 census is underway, and this year the government of Canada is redoubling its efforts to encourage Canadians to complete their census questionnaires. While census data is always important, as it affects policymaking of all sorts, from the building of schools to the expansion of public transportation, this year's census is particularly crucial given that it will evaluate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Canadians.



While filling out a census form might feel like yet another to-do in an already busy time, we strongly encourage everyone to take time out for this important act of citizenship. You can quickly and easily complete your census questionnaire [online](#) using the access code you received in the mail. If you need assistance or would like to have a paper (or alternate format) questionnaire, you can call the Census Help Line at 1-855-340-2021.

Accessing the Student Information System (SIS)

Parents and guardians who have not yet logged into the VVS Student Information System (SIS) should do so as soon as possible, as this is the best way to monitor your child's progress, review correspondence, keep track of course timelines, and stay up to date with your child's activities and submissions. You should have received an email providing you with login information for your account.

To get started, visit the [school website](#) and click on the Student/Guardian Login button in the top right hand corner to be directed to the SIS login page. If you have forgotten your username and/or password, you can retrieve them by submitting your email address. You can also contact us at vwsupport@pembinahills.ca or by phone at 1-855-974-5333 x5317 if you have any trouble.



Adult Learning at Vista Virtual School

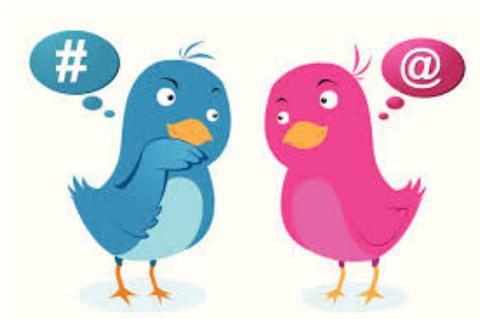
Vista Virtual School welcomes applications from adult upgrading students—defined as those aged 20 or up as of September 1, 2020—throughout the year; adult students can start courses at any time. For more information on our adult program, please visit [our website](#) or email us at vsadults@pembinahills.ca.

School Council and Parent Input

Although we do not have a formal School Council, we welcome parents, guardians, and students to provide input on the operations of the school. Your suggestions can be directed to [Mike Loitz](#), Principal.

Engage With Us on Social Media

In addition to this newsletter and our regular website news postings, Vista Virtual School is also active on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). We encourage you to follow us for updates on everything from post-secondary orientations to work experience opportunities to news articles and online resources of interest to students and parents, as well as to just say hello and engage with us.



Also, should you come across any interesting virtual learning resources you think we should share via our social media networks, we would love to hear from you. We too are always learning, and we would love to share what you find out there.

Monthly Events Calendar

Check out our [monthly events](#) on our website. We update this calendar as events are added.

Important Dates in June

June – [LGBTQ+ Pride Month](#)

June – [National Indigenous History Month](#)

June 1 – [Global Day of Parents](#)

June 4 – [VVS Online Graduation Ceremony](#)

June 5 – [World Environment Day](#)
June 14 – [World Blood Donor Day](#)
June 15 – [5-credit summer course registration deadline](#)
June 15 – [Second semester assignment/quiz deadline](#)
June 20 – [Father's Day](#)
June 20 – [Summer solstice \(beginning of summer\)](#)
June 21 – [National Indigenous Peoples Day](#)
June 22 – [Second semester exam deadline](#)
June 24 – [St. Jean Baptiste Day \(Fête nationale du Québec\)](#)
June 27 – [Canadian Multiculturalism Day](#)
June 30 – [End of 2020-2021 school year \(Yay!\)](#)

Indigenous Learning Resources: Steps Toward Reconciliation

Of the many criticisms that have been made against the Alberta government's proposed K-6 curriculum, one area of particular concern has been its lack of Indigenous input and perspective. The draft curriculum was slammed by both the Métis Nation of Alberta and the Confederacy of Treaty 6 Chiefs, with the latter group calling it a "Eurocentric, American-focused, Christian-dominant narrative" that "perpetuates rather than addresses systemic racism."

Across the province, Indigenous leaders and organizations have called for the curriculum to be redone, and for Indigenous voices to be actively included in the process.



The road to reconciliation is a long and hard one, as was made graphically evident last week with the traumatizing [discovery of the bodies of 215 children](#)—some as young as three years old—on the site of a former residential school located on the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation in Kamloops, BC. Canadians from coast to coast reacted with horror at the discovery, with BC Premier John Horgan describing it as "a stark example of the violence the Canadian residential school system inflicted upon Indigenous peoples and how the consequences of these atrocities continue to this day."

This tragic discovery served as a reminder that Canadians still do not have a full appreciation for the scale of the injustices committed against the country's first peoples. While the national outpouring of grief and anger over the news clearly demonstrates that progress has been made, we still have far to go as a country in terms of awareness—as the Alberta government's track record for promoting Indigenous-informed education makes clear. If there was ever a blunt reminder of an ongoing need for reconciliation-focused education, last week's discovery in Kamloops was it.

A plethora of online resources exist for people of all ages to educate themselves about the history and culture of Alberta's (and Canada's) Indigenous peoples, the legacy of the residential school system and other manifestations of systemic racism, and the steps that we can all take to promote reconciliation.

Don't know where to start? Here is a list of online resources to get you started:

- 1) [**Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund**](#): The Downie Wenjack Fund website is a treasure trove of educational resources and contact information, all centred on the cause of collective reconciliation through awareness, education, and action.
- 2) [**Alberta Treaty Education**](#): An online resource created by the University of Alberta Library system, Alberta Treaty Education hosts a wide range of videos and other downloadable K-12 resources on the history and importance of Canada's First Nations treaties.
- 3) [**Beyond 94: Truth and Reconciliation in Canada**](#): Beyond 94 is an interactive website created by the CBC that expands upon the 94 calls to action of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, featuring (among other thing) metrics designed to measure the country's progress on said calls to action.
- 4) [**Historica Canada Indigenous History Education Portal**](#): Created by Historica Canada, an organization dedicated to highlighting traditionally marginalized communities' contributions to modern Canada, this educational portal is a massive storehouse of resources aimed mainly at K-12 teachers but of interest to anybody looking for Indigenous perspectives on Canadian history.
- 5) [**Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada**](#): Much more than simply an online atlas, this beautiful, highly informative site was created by Canadian Geographic, and is also available in four print volumes: First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and Truth and Reconciliation.
- 6) [**New Journeys**](#): New Journeys is essentially an online Friendship Centre, which houses a wide range of resources aimed primarily at Indigenous youth, including interactive language learning resources for [Blackfoot](#), [Cree](#), [Michif](#) and other Indigenous languages.
- 7) [**Walking Together: First Nations, Métis and Inuit Perspectives in Curriculum**](#): Alberta's draft K-6 curriculum may have missed the mark, but the Learn Alberta portal's interactive site Walking Together is a superb resource—an easy-to-navigate, child-friendly site covering topics ranging from treaty rights to traditional kinship bonds to the role of Elders in Indigenous communities.
- 8) [**Whose Land**](#): Whose Land is an interactive online atlas of the Americas that vividly illustrates the complex ethnolinguistic and cultural tapestry of pre-colonial North America.

Know of anything good that belongs on this list? We would love to hear about it.

Staying Safe on the Water This Summer

With summer around the corner, many of you will doubtless be flocking to our province's innumerable lakes—with swimming and boating being both enjoyable and permitted. Thanks to COVID, more Canadians than ever are spending time outdoors, with recreational boat sales reaching records highs in 2020. But with more people on the water than ever, and in-person swimming lessons cancelled due to the pandemic, water safety is a more pressing issue than ever.



Every year over 400 Canadians die from drowning-related accidents. While the trend in drowning deaths between 1990 and 2014 was downward, there are mounting concerns about Canadians' water safety, especially for children, given the unprecedented numbers engaging in recreational boating and

the widespread cancellation of swimming lessons and summer camps, where children typically learn about safe boating practices, proper use of life jackets, preventing hypothermia, and so on.

The government of Canada's [Office of Boating Safety](#) (a department within Transport Canada) has produced a wide range of resources aimed at keeping Canadians safe on the water this summer and beyond. For parents and older students, the downloadable [Safe Boating Guide](#), which covers everything from safety equipment requirements to how to use nautical charts correctly, is an invaluable resource. There is also a [safe boating app](#) that can be downloaded onto your phone.

Want to know more? The [Discover Boating website](#) is another great resource for boating safety information, including quizzes where you can test your knowledge. Also, parents with younger children will want to check out the Office of Boating Safety's [Children's Activity Book](#). This printable bilingual resource contains a wide range of fun games and activities, all on the theme of staying safe in watercraft.

Have fun out there on the lake this summer—just be sure to read up on your boating safety before you head out!

Student Profile: Rachel Anderson

Ask the average 15-year-old girl about her life goals, and chances are that winning a National Finals Rodeo championship gold buckle is not top of her list. Then again, nobody has ever accused Rachel Anderson of being the “average 15-year-old.” With summer vacation around the corner, the Vista Virtual School grade 9 student is now looking to qualify for next year’s Alberta High School Rodeo tournament, a major stepping-stone on the road to glory.

“For this year, my goal is to qualify for the provincials, and then to make it into the top four so that I qualify for the National High School Rodeo championship,” Rachel explains. “In addition, I have a few colts in training this year that I hope to be entering in small local jackpots by the end of the summer.”



A native of Winfield, a rural hamlet in Wetaskiwin County, Rachel is a *bona fide* Alberta cowgirl, living on a ranch with three dogs, 25 horses, 20 longhorn cows, and about 30 bison cows. While she was always active in a variety of pursuits, including hockey and competitive dance, Rachel’s rodeo roots run deep (with a father, uncle, and grandfather all involved in the sport) and it did not take her long to find her way into this world.

“My dad brought me home a pony when I was about four years old,” she says of her earliest exposure to the sport.

“Let's just say it wasn't long at all before I was blasting as fast as that little pony could go across the field. I never liked going slow. My dad then entered me in my first gymkhana (a type of equestrian event featuring speed pattern racing and timed games), I was hooked from the get-go. As I got bigger, I moved up pony sizes, and after about four years of competition I graduated to my first full-sized horse at age eight—a big bay mare named Smoke. Smoke was the one that really made me believe I could win, even as the competition got tougher. Sure enough, I won three buckles on her. I wouldn't be where I am today without her!”

Smoke is now retired from the rodeo world, but Rachel now works with two horses who are close to her heart: a beautiful 10-year-old grey mare named Pearl, who she uses for barrel racing and goat-tying, and a diminutive six-year-old palomino mare named Barbie, who she rides in pole-bending events.

“I've only had Pearl since last September, but she's a total superstar,” Rachel exclaims. “As for Barbie, I used for running barrels all last summer, but for the high school rodeos, she is going to be my pole horse. Barbie is an absolute firecracker! While she's still a young horse, she has already catapulted us into the top 15 standings. This horse is really something special.”

A typical day for Rachel starts with school from 8:00 am until noon, and then it's time to transition to cowgirl mode for between two and a half and four hours of riding and doing chores around the ranch. Then it's time to become a student again, with more school from 4:00 until 7:00 pm. Of course, life is not always this straightforward for Rachel, and indeed the demands of school and ranch life can make for some very long days.

Not that Rachel is one to complain. “I enjoy being able to make my own schedule,” she says. “It can be hard to be self-disciplined enough to sit down and get schoolwork done, and ignore whatever else is going on, but thankfully I have fabulous teachers and parents that are always willing to help me out.”

“Vista Virtual School has been incredibly supportive,” she adds. “I couldn't imagine being in a regular school and while staying in top competitive shape. The courses are challenging but attainable, and the program is straightforward to navigate. And I cannot say enough good things about the teachers. If I need help with anything I just send off an email and I get a response within an hour almost all the time! I would highly recommend VVS to anyone that has a time-demanding extracurricular life.”

While still only 15, Rachel has big plans for her future. Beyond her big high school rodeo championship dreams, she hopes to become a world-leading barrel horse trainer. In addition, she hopes to eventually study dentistry at Texas A&M University, a school high up on her list due to—no surprise—its top-flight rodeo team.

For Rachel, the joy of the rodeo world is about more than the thrill of the competition and about winning prizes—it's about connection: with her fellow riders, with the close-knit rodeo community, and, above all, with the animals involved.

“Your horse always needs to come first,” she explains. “You need to run them with purpose and let them know they did well. The biggest misconception out there about rodeo is that it’s abusive; this couldn’t be further from the truth. As competitors, we protect and baby our rodeo partners, and they know just as well as we do when they’ve won—it’s all in the rider’s energy and attitude. Do it for your horse, but also have fun. You meet the best people in the rodeo world, you get to travel the world, and have a ton of fun. I would recommend this life to anyone!”

Contacts

Principal	Mike Loitz		
Associate Principals	Treena Bradbury	Frank McCallum	
Academic Counsellors	Dominick Gallo	Christy Filgate (Special Ed.)	
Adult Academic Counsellors	vsadults@pembinahills.ca		
School Hours	8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. (teachers’ working hours are 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.)		
Contact Information	P: 1-855-974-5333	VVS Support x5317	
School Email	vsupport@pembinahills.ca	<i>Calgary Campus</i> x6200 341 58 Avenue SE Calgary, AB T2H 0P3	
We're Online	Twitter @VistaVirtualSch	Facebook VistaVirtualSch	Website vvschool.ca
Connect with Us	Please follow us on Facebook and Twitter for updates on events and activities throughout the year. Our website is also a valuable source of information.	Do you have a story to tell (or a typo to report)? Email Ben Freeland .	The newsletter is published monthly and sent to students, parents, and guardians by email.