

Check out the July 2021 Newsletter!

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



Learning Without Limits

Happy summer! And wow, has it ever been hot in this province lately! We hope you've all been finding ingenious ways to stay cool in this heatwave as you've been winding down the 2020-2021 school year and preparing for summer.

Congratulations again to our graduating class of 2021! Vista Virtual School held its first entirely online commencement ceremony on Friday, June 4, featuring a wonderful valedictory speech from Zachary Larsen, who is featured in this edition of the newsletter. For those who have been asking, yes, the ceremony was videoed and, yes, it will be made available for viewing shortly, so stay tuned.

This month we welcome a new principal, Steven Kaplan. While new to VVS, Steven is no stranger to Pembina Hills School Division, having previously served as principal for Dunstable, Westlock Elementary, Barrhead Composite High School, and, most recently, at the Alberta Distance Learning Centre (ADLC). Steven is excited to take on this new role in these strange times and looks forward to getting to know everybody.

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 July!

Sincerely,



Steven Kaplan,
Principal



Treena Bradbury,
Associate Principal



Frank McCallum,
Associate Principal

New This Month

Meet Our New Principal!

For the first time in 22 years, Vista Virtual School welcomes a new principal. Steven Kaplan officially takes over as principal this month as Mike Loitz retired at the end of a 34-year career with PHSD, including 22 at VVS.

Although technically born in Edmonton, Steven has lived most of his life in Barrhead and indeed considers the town home. A graduate of Barrhead Composite High School, he holds a bachelor's degree in physical education, an after degree in secondary education, and an MEd with a focus on leadership and school improvement, all from the University of Alberta.

After completing his training, Steven began his teaching career in southern Alberta before moving back to Barrhead in 2004, where he taught at Barrhead Composite before accepting his first administrative assignment as associate principal at Fort Assiniboine School in 2007. Since then he has served as principal for Dunstable, Westlock Elementary, Barrhead Composite High School, and the ADLC. He has also served PHSD as chair of district professional development and the district recognition committee.

Steven, his wife and two children live in Barrhead. They enjoy an active, outdoor lifestyle, that includes fishing, mountain biking, skiing, and a variety of sports. Steven is active in the community by being a coach for school teams or community teams, such as minor hockey and baseball, and active in his church. Steven's career mission is to "support others to be the best version of themselves" whether it be with his family, students, or the people he works with, and he believes the foundation of this is in relationships.

Steven can be reached at steven.kaplan@pembinahills.ca. Welcome to VVS—we wish you all the best as you embark on this exciting new chapter of your career!

Summer School

Our 2021 summer semester is now underway. Registration for 5-credit summer courses is now closed but you can still register for 1- and 3-credit courses until Saturday, July 10. The deadline for withdrawing from all summer courses (5-credit and 1- and 3-credit alike) is a week from now on July 10.

Marks for summer courses begin being reported on Friday, July 16, and all summer semester work must be completed by Friday, August 6. If you have any questions or concerns about summer school at VVS, please contact us at vsupport@pembinahills.ca.



Fall Registration

We are at peak processing time for 2021-2022 registrations. As recently noted on the website, our office staff are currently swamped with applications, and as such it is taking longer than normal to respond to inquiries. If you have any questions or concerns about registration, please email us at vsupport@pembinahills.ca. Your patience is much appreciated.

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.

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

We are currently accepting textbook returns from full-time students. Please note that our former distribution centre in Barrhead is no longer open due to the closure of ADLC, therefore we are only accepting book returns at our Calgary campus.

We are accepting textbook returns by mail and in person by appointment. Textbooks and other loaned materials can be mailed to the following address:

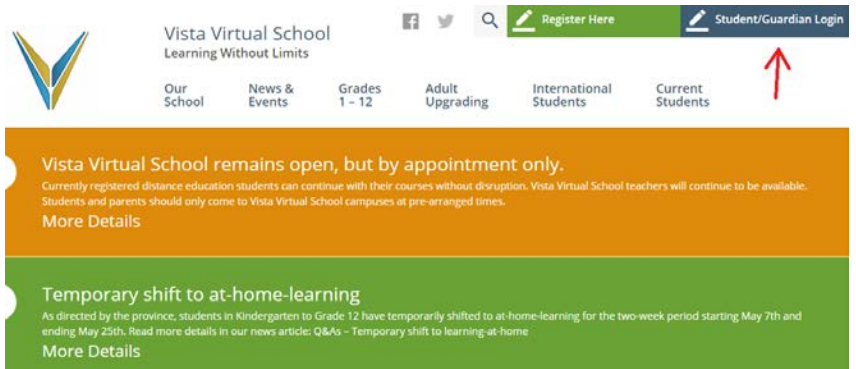
Vista Virtual School
341 58 Avenue SE
Calgary, AB T2H 0P3

Calgary Campus

Support staff are back at VVS' Calgary Campus starting Monday, July 5 and will be responding to calls at 1-855-974-5333 x5317. However, we still request that visitors to the campus book appointments in advance, whether it is for returning textbooks or for any other reason. Those wishing to visit are required to book an appointment in advance, follow all Alberta Health Services guidelines, and—of course—to wear a mask.

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 vsupport@pembinahills.ca or by phone at 1-855-974-5333 x5317 if you have any trouble.

Adult Learning at Vista Virtual School

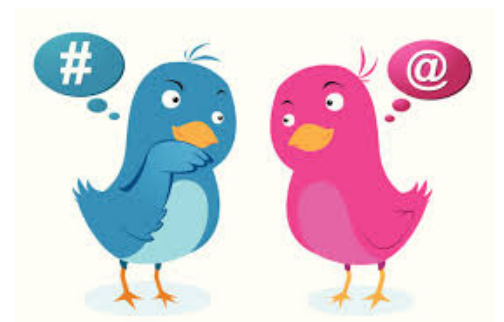
Vista Virtual School welcomes applications from adult upgrading students—defined as those aged 20 or up as of September 1, 2020—throughout the year; adult students can start courses at any time. For more information on our adult program, please visit [our website](#) or email us at vsadults@pembinahills.ca.

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 Principal [Steven Kaplan](#).

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 July

July 1 – [Canada Day](#)

July 10 – [Summer course withdrawal deadline](#)

July 10 – [Deadline for registration for 1- and 3-credit summer courses](#)

July 15 – [World Youth Skills Day](#)

July 15 – [Start of summer semester mark reporting](#)

July 18 – [Nelson Mandela International Day](#)

July 19 – 20 – [Eid al-Adha](#)

July 30 – [International Day of Friendship](#)

Four Strategies for Beating the “Summer Slide”

It’s summer. Of course, for some Vista Virtual School students, the summer months are business-as-usual when it comes to studies, but for many others, like the majority of students in the regular system, July and August are a much-anticipated time to escape anything that that might possibly be construed as “school”.



While nobody would dispute that kids deserve some summer reprieve, it has long been noticed—by teachers and parents alike—that students’ skills have a tendency to slip a bit during the summer months. The phenomenon of the “summer slide” is particularly pronounced among elementary students, where the learning curve is steeper than at any other point in the educational trajectory. A [2020 study of third to fifth graders](#) showed a 20 percent decline in reading and a 27 percent decline in math skills during summer break.

Fortunately, resources are available for parents who want to keep their children’s minds in shape while also keeping things fun. Here are four ideas, which we’ve borrowed from an [article in Scholastic.com](#) on the same topic.

1) Let kids read what they want.

Kids generally enjoy reading, provided the books they read grab their interest. Especially with younger children, a little reading goes a long way when it comes to keeping those school-acquired reading skills in shape, and with public libraries once again open, the time is right to encourage a bit of binge-

reading. [Edmonton Public Library](#) and [Calgary Public Library](#) both have organized summer reading programs for kids of all ages, as do library systems elsewhere in the province.

2) Make time for smart play.

When it comes to keeping math skills up to speed during the summer break, there's no shortage of games out there to keep young minds occupied. Here are [20 math-oriented games](#) that can be played without a computer—giving kids a break from screen time will also keep school-acquired skills in use. Memory games are also great for flexing young brains as well as occupying time in the car on road trips.

3) Get out of the house.

Given that life now appears to be returning to normal, this should be less of a challenge than it was a year ago. This summer will be a great time to visit museums and historical sites with your kids and otherwise stimulating their minds with novelty. The [Royal Alberta Museum](#) is more or less up and running normally, as are the [Glenbow Museum](#) in Calgary and the [Royal Tyrrell Museum](#) in Drumheller. Alberta abounds in great educational sites, and this summer will be a great time to rediscover them.

4) Use your imagination.

Anything that engages children's imagination is good for staving off the summer slide. Whether it's inventing new games, creating and staging original theatre plays, or engaging in feats of engineering with educational LEGO sets, virtually anything that involves them not being glued to a screen is good for kids' brains. Given the year we've had, it shouldn't be difficult to sell kids on engaging with something non-screen-related.

Student Profile: Zachary Larsen

When Zachary Larsen received the news that he was being named valedictorian of the Vista Virtual School Class of 2021, all he initially knew was that the school "wanted to talk about his grades"—words that, not surprisingly, sent his nerves into overdrive.

"When I got a call asking to discuss my grades, I was a tad nervous," says Zachary. "After all, what good news can come from a teacher wanting to discuss my grades? This of course all changed when I heard the news. I couldn't stop grinning and had to take most of the day off due to being unable to focus on my school. It was, and still is, a true honour to be named valedictorian for the VVS class of 2021."

The honour came at the end of a very busy school year for Zachary, which saw him take on a heavy course load of Physics 30, Math 31 (calculus), and Social



Studies 30-1, which, combined with a job that recently re-opened and graduation-related events, conspired to give him very little free time for his usual pastimes, which include videogames and miniature war games.

“It was often that I was doing school late into the night, even on weekends, and there were a few periods where I was concerned as to whether or not I would be able to finish the semester in time,” he notes. “I made it, but my sanity definitely wore thin towards the end of it.”

A native of Campbell River, BC, Zachary first enrolled at Vista Virtual School eight years ago following his family’s move to Fort McMurray. A lack of abundant local school options, coupled with the stress of the family’s relocation, led his parents to enrol him in online schooling, as well as a feeling that his previous public school in Campbell River had left much to be desired.

Zachary considers this move to virtual learning to have been fortuitous, especially in light of the events of the past year and a half.

“COVID-19 has really highlighted the discrepancies in what public school students are taught,” he asserts. “Public school students, at least in my town, have been able to use COVID as an excuse to not put in work, and the teachers have largely let them do this. I know someone who handed in almost none of their assignments for one of their 5-credit option courses and was still given a passing grade after they claimed that pandemic stress was responsible.

“On top of this, when diploma exams were made optional, because many schools who used the diploma in place of a final exam had not developed final exams of their own, students were able to pass without taking in any exams. This resulted in many students graduating without an adequate understanding of their courses. This is not a problem for VVS, with it already being an online school, as teachers were prepared and students who passed could be confident in their knowledge.”

While Zachary has the mid-to-long-term goals of pursuing a degree in chemical engineering and possibly graduate studies after that, the 17-year-old is mainly focused on enjoying his summer and taking advantage of the current opening up with time with friends.

“Pandemic isolation combined with online schooling has definitely made me a bit stir-crazy. As restrictions continue to lift, I not-so-patiently await being able to see all my friends again in a post-COVID world. In the meantime, I would like to express my immense gratitude towards VVS and its staff as a whole. You all have created a wonderful and flexible school environment that manages to, at least in my opinion, deliver better education, in spite of the immense distance between teachers and students, than your in-person public school counterparts.”

Congratulations, Zachary, on your valedictory honours! We hope and all your Class of 2021 peers enjoy a well-earned summer break!

Contacts

Principal	Steven Kaplan		
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	WVS Support x5317	
		<i>Calgary Campus</i> x6200 341 58 Avenue SE Calgary, AB T2H 0P3	
School Email	vsupport@pembinahills.ca		
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.