



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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## LOHUD: Hudson Valley schools open next week: When does your district start? What big issues loom?

NANCY CUTLER August 28, 2024

Public schools throughout the Lower Hudson Valley start opening Sept. 3, though some will wait for later in the week to launch the 2024-25 academic year and several are staggering first days and start times for kids. (See our full listing below to find out when your schools open.)

Plenty of issues — some brought to the fore in a post-pandemic educational landscape — are on the minds of educators, families and political leaders.

## Federal, state, local politics impact New York classrooms

It's a presidential election year, so those AP Gov lessons take on another layer of relevance. Since just before the last presidential election, [New York has allowed 16- and 17-year-olds to preregister to vote](#). This year, Gov. Kathy Hochul signed [a law, sponsored by Sen. Shelley Mayer](#), D-Yonkers, that [requires schools promote voter registration](#) and pre-registration, including help with applications.



Political and cultural issues that divide nationally have impacted locally. In Clarkstown, controversy over a policy that echoes state guidance regarding transgender and gender nonconforming students blew up into a school board campaign issue. A new board, once seated, rescinded the policy, but the state's regulations on transgender youth stand.

A wave of states are passing or considering smartphone bans in classrooms, the result of educational and mental health concerns that arose post-pandemic. Hochul wants New York to consider the same. The Democratic governor said she's working on legislation in 2025 to ban students from carrying the devices on school grounds.

Funding remains a top concern, especially for districts with high needs. The Rockefeller Institute, a think tank that's part of the State University of New York, has undertaken a review of New York's convoluted "Foundation Aid" formula that's used to distribute state aid to districts. The Rockefeller Institute continues to gather public comments through Sept. 6;

find the link to [share your testimony](#) at the Rockefeller Institute's website, [rockinst.org](http://rockinst.org); look for the tab that says "[foundation aid study](#)."

## **Busing challenges continue**

A recently updated state law allows cameras on school buses to capture scofflaws who pass the vehicles while stopped. In Rockland, all districts are participating in the system and some 17,000 tickets have been issued. Westchester County is in the process of getting its system up and running, though Yonkers' system is already operational.

Meanwhile, many districts continue to face bus driver shortages.

Rockland BOCES Director of Transportation JoAnne Thompson said the post-pandemic era has been tricky for a couple reasons. Bus drivers tend to be retirees and some became concerned about their health during the pandemic, although, Thompson said, carriers and districts have taken plenty of measures to protect kids and transportation staff. Thompson said the job's part time hours, once a great way to supplement a retiree's pension, may not be enough now. And bus driver hours, split between morning and afternoon, make it hard to cobble together other work.

Thompson said the job is rewarding. "You watch a kid from kindergarten to when they graduate" and see them blossom, she said. "We see all of the fruits of our labor."

## **Districts seek new leaders**

The superintendent musical chairs continues. Several districts are now operating with interim or acting leaders, including East Ramapo, [Nyack](#) and [Mount Vernon](#).

## 'Can't solve everything at once': East Ramapo's interim superintendent talks priorities

Some districts are managing distinct challenges: [East Ramapo](#) faces a significant deficit, even after the state's education commissioner took the unusual step of demanding the board impose an extra tax levy hike. [Mount Vernon's board continues to pursue disciplinary charges](#) against a suspended superintendent who is under federal criminal investigation.

Many districts continue to seek teachers and support staff; bilingual teachers remain in demand.

Meanwhile, kids are getting ready for their classroom return. Organizations around the Lower Hudson Valley have held backpack and school supply giveaways, including Yonkers' annual Backpack to School Drive, which delivered 400 backpacks and a bunch of new school supplies during an Aug. 27 event. Rockland's People to People food pantry helped get more than 1,400 kids ready for school with backpack and school supply distributions.

## First day(s) for local districts

Here's when the 54 public school districts in Westchester, Rockland and Putnam counties start:

### Tuesday, Sept. 3

**Westchester:** Ardsley; Bedford; Blind Brook; Bronxville; Byram Hills; Chappaqua; Croton-Harmon; Dobbs Ferry; Elmsford; Greenburgh; Hastings-on-Hudson; Hendrick Hudson; Irvington; Lakeland; Mamaroneck; Mount Pleasant; Mount Vernon students' half-day, with first full day Sept. 4; Ossining (10th through 12th grades start Sept. 4); Peekskill (staggered

entrance for Sept. 3 and Sept. 4); Pelham; Pleasantville; Pocantico Hills; Port Chester; Rye; Rye Neck; Scarsdale; Somers; Tuckahoe; Tarrytown; Yorktown.

**Rockland:** Clarkstown; North Rockland; Nyack; Pearl River; South Orangetown.

**Putnam:** Brewster; Carmel; Garrison; Haldane.

## Wednesday, Sept. 4

**Westchester:** Eastchester; Katonah-Lewisboro; New Rochelle, all students half-day.

**Rockland:** East Ramapo; Nanuet; Suffern.

**Putnam:** Mahopac (half-day kindergarten, 6th and 9th grades have a transition day on Sept. 3); Putnam Valley (Elementary, fifth, sixth and ninth grades attend Sept. 3; kindergarten is phased in over Sept. 3 and Sept. 4, with all attending Sept. 5).

## Thursday, Sept. 5

**Westchester:** Briarcliff has its first full day, though sixth-graders and new high schoolers start with a half-day on Sept. 4; Edgemont; Harrison; North Salem; Valhalla; White Plains; Yonkers.

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