

Advanced Herbalism in the Vitalist Tradition



Student Handbook 2025-26

Table of Contents

School Information	2
Our Philosophy	3
Our Vision	3
Understanding Vitalism	3
A.C.O.R.N.	4
"Flipped" Classroom Model	4
Faculty Members	5
Program Overview	6
Course Curriculum	7
General Enrollment Information	8
Prerequisites	8
Academic Commitment	8
Class Schedule 2025-26	8
Course Hours & Certificates	8
Tuition & Costs	8
Tuition Payment Plan	8
Acceptance	9
How Class Works	9
Regular Classes	9
Attendance by Recordings	9
• Homework	9
Self-Study/Audio files (NAIMH Course Materials)	9
Google Drive Homework System	9
Medicine Making Kits	
School Policies	
Communications with the School	10
Non-Discrimination	10
Conduct	10
Confidentiality	10
Complaints & Feedback	
Disputes	11
Dismissal	11
Withdrawal from the Program/Refund Policy	
Postponement of Start Date	
School Closures	
Requirements to Earn Certificate	
Attendance Policy	
Absences	12
Tardiness	12
Attendance by Recordings	12
Assignments & Homework Policy	
Progress Reports	
Payment Policy	13
Placement Assistance	13
Next Program	12

School Information

The ACORN School of Herbal Medicine (referred to as ACORN) offers education in medical herbalism, clinical nutrition, basic physiology, field botany, herbal pharmacy, and other aspects of natural health. Our faculty members are certified herbalists with professional clinical experience and strong backgrounds in clinical nutrition. Our programs are not accredited by any educational agency in the State of California.

ACORN is affiliated with the North American Institute of Medical Herbalism (referred to as NAIMH). ACORN teaches the curriculum created by Paul Bergner, Medical Herbalist and Clinical Nutritionist for NAIMH. Paul founded NAIMH in 2003, and from 2003 until 2012, NAIMH was approved and Regulated by the Colorado Department of Higher Education, Private Occupational School Board. In July 2012 NAIMH relocated to Portland, Oregon. Oregon does not regulate this type of school, but NAIMH has kept and maintain the coursework approved by Colorado. NAIMH is not academically accredited, and students are not eligible for federal government loans. Each ACORN instructor has completed courses with NAIMH, under the instruction of Paul Bergner.

ACORN is owned solely by Heather Luna Keasbey, CCH, CN.

Mailing address: PO Box 1664 Nevada City, CA 95959

Telephone: 530-955-3131

Website: www.acornherbschool.com

Email: herbalists@acornherbschool.com

Our classroom is now online. All classes are held online using video conferencing technology. Students will join online for live classes taught by Heather Luna and still listen to audio recording of Paul Bergner's course curriculum. Medicine making supplies will be mailed to each student on a monthly basis and will contain all material needed to complete the herbal pharmacy and medicine making requirements for that month.

Advanced Herbalism in the Vitalist Tradition program students are dually enrolled at both the ACORN School of Herbal Medicine and the North American Institute of Medical Herbalism. Upon completion of this course, you will receive two separate certificates: one certificate from ACORN and one from NAIMH.





Work with the forces of Nature to establish a better quality of life for modern living



Our Philosophy

In the practice of herbalism, we seek to treat the whole person, not the disease. In doing so herbalists employ healing methods intended to increase vitality and support the natural forces within us to restore balance on all levels. Our educational programs emphasize Vitalist principles in which to elevate the quality of life to facilitate deeper and more meaningful relationships with ourselves, our bodies, our community and to the Earth. We offer both a traditional and clinical platform from which to launch herbal practitioners into the life long journey. Using herbs as a way of life is an art. We support the creative process of self-care as a means to offer our services to others.

Our Vision

We invite you to participate in paving the way for a cultural shift in healing the landscape of the human being. As herbalists we employ healing methods that support Nature's innate ability to flourish. On this journey we learn to work with the forces of Nature. We seek to establish a better quality of life in modern living, knowing that health and wellness are not limited to what is perceived in physical form, but must be addressed at all levels of our being. This approach to personalized health care fosters an enriched human experience which directly affects the well-being of our relationships, our communities, and our culture. ACORN School of Herbal Medicine wellness programs are how we want to contribute and best serve our community, both locally and globally.

Understanding Vitalism

"Vitalism in healing is a clinical strategy based on the principle that Life, Nature, and the Great Spirit from which they arise are fully present in all the tissues of the body, and also in the psyche, the spiritual heart, and the soul, sustaining life and health, providing momentum for personal evolution on all levels, and for the fulfillment of the highest purpose in social and spiritual life. Vitalist practitioners employ clinical strategies and methods which support this life power through encouragement of nourishment, digestion, rest, and appropriate activity, identification of purpose in personal life, connection with nature, an active spiritual life, identification and removal of obstacles to cure on all levels, and avoidance of methods which suppress or distort life processes. The Vitalist incorporates all aspects of science, especially physiology and pathophysiology, but equally values knowledge from traditional herbalism, empirical observation, instinct and intuition, and is not confined to the narrow materialistic world view that dominates much of modern science, medicine, and social life."

- Paul Bergner

A.C.O.R.N.

Academic Community Of Radical Nature-cure

Working with plants is working with the forces of Nature. Nature Cure is a healing modality as old as humanity itself. Our contemporary expression of it originated in the mid-1800s. Practitioners used whole food diets, restoration of the circadian rhythm, bathing in healing waters, movement in the fresh clean air, and the skilled application of herbs. This was practiced while spending ample time in natural landscapes and wild places. They found these methods to be curative of many conditions. It is from this tradition that modern naturopathic medicine was developed. In order to facilitate a cure, we must unpack the habits of modern lifestyle and restore the balance of Nature's original instructions in human life. It is our mission to resurrect these principles in the practice of western herbalism today.

We are a learning community and each of us comes to this calling with something to offer. We learn directly from experience, from our own and from each other. Every student on this path has the ability to become a teacher for ourselves, for those we serve, and for one another. The unique effects of herbs on one individual offer experience for all of us in the setting of shared community learning.

We cultivate a ferocious appetite for learning with in-depth study and rigor in our academic work. In defense of Nature's ability to heal, we take a radical stand against those dominant medical practices that suppress life's innate healing processes. We are the resistance against the distorted views of suppression which are known to cause harm and illness.

We have come to call our school the Academic Community of Radical Nature-cure.



"Flipped" Classroom Model

ACORN School of Herbal Medicine certificate courses offers a "flipped" classroom model for most of the academic portions in each program where reading materials and instructional audio recordings are done prior to class time. Class time is then spent engaging in further discussion, answering questions, and working together in participation of hands-on class work. This approach allows for community learning as we practice key components with feedback. This is a teaching model that is being adopted by universities and colleges. The benefits of classroom flipping are that students are able to learn more deeply, there is more active participation in learning, the interaction increases and students learn from each other. This method of education helps both instructors and students to get more feedback.

Faculty Members



Heather Luna, Clinical Herbalist, Clinical Nutritionist Founder & Director of the ACORN School of Herbal Medicine

Heather is the primary instructor of the Footprints program, supporting instructor of the Advanced program, and supervising clinician of the Free Clinic & Clinical Residency program.

Heather Luna teaches full time at the ACORN School of Herbal Medicine and oversees the Medicine Garden outdoor learning classroom. She has held a private practice since 2002 and has instructed classes in Western Herbalism since 2006. Her clinical work emphasizes vitalist therapeutics with the use of herbs, nutrition.

and Nature Cure practices. This includes custom herbal formulation, individualized nutrition protocols, coaching through food intolerance, therapeutic bodywork and uterine massage. She specializes in individual support for cultivating healthy lifestyle habits adapted for the conditions of modern living.

Heather is a graduate of the Rocky Mountain Center of Botanical Studies and the North American Institute of Medical Herbalism. After completing 4 years of formal training, she continued to pursue private studies under Ann Drucker, Ms. Beatrice Waight, and Paul Bergner. She now maintains hundreds of client case records which illustrate that vitalist strategies work to achieve outstanding clinical results. It is her passion for Nature which guides her practice with the use of herbs, nutrition, bodywork, and apitherapy. Heather holds a lineage in the vitalist tradition and has a mission to pass it on.



Paul Bergner, Medical Herbalist, Clinical Nutritionist Founder of North American Institute of Medical Herbalism

Paul is the creator of our course curriculum ~ he is the voice on all audio recorded lectures and it is his work in Vitalist Medicine that we will primarily study.

Paul Bergner has studied and practiced natural medicine since 1973, with formal studies in naturopathy, medical herbalism, clinical nutrition, traditional Chinese medicine, Ayurvedic medicine, flower essences, yoga therapy, and bodywork, including undergraduate studies in pre-medicine and psychology, and 50

semester hours of doctoral level medical studies at National College of Naturopathic Medicine. He has edited the Medical Herbalism journal since its founding in 1989, and has written seven books on medical herbalism, nutrition, Chinese medicine, ethnobotany, and naturopathic medicine. He has also edited periodicals on clinical nutrition and naturopathic medicine.

Paul directed the clinical herbalism programs at Rocky Mountain Center for Botanical Studies and the NAIMH for eighteen years, training more than 230 certified clinical herbalists in an 1100+ hour education that culminates in an eight-month internship program. He is currently on the regular and clinical faculties of the Colorado School for Clinical Herbalism in Boulder, CO, and the School for Traditional Western Herbalism in Portland, OR. He has been adjunct faculty in nutrition at Naropa University, visiting faculty in nutrition and pathophysiology at the Tai Sophia Institute, and nutrition faculty at the Seven Bowls School of Nutrition. In addition to directing the NAIMH, he teaches herbal Materia medica and therapeutics, clinical nutrition, basic medical sciences, clinical skills, medical history and philosophy, and nature studies.



Advanced Herbalism in the Vitalist Tradition 2025-26

September 10th, 2025 - May 27th, 2026 Wednesdays 11:00 am - 4:00 pm PST (with lunch from 1:00-2:00 pm)

Program Overview

Our Advanced Herbalism program prepares the herbalist for becoming a clinical practitioner in the field of Vitalist Herbalism. Students will learn how to complete a full-length client intake, perform a deep level case investigation by applying vitalist assessment skills and case analysis techniques. Students will practice the art of how to apply natural therapeutics and herbs to individual cases, and gain critical insights to perform subsequent follow up visits with a client for long term health transformations. This includes the necessary technical skills to write up a case for peer review and faculty feedback in a clinical setting. Completion of the Advanced Herbalism in the Vitalist Tradition program grants students a certificate from ACORN for 128 hours of class time plus a certificate from NAIMH for 329 self-study hours.

This program features audio recorded lectures with Paul Bergner as part of our flipped classroom model. Students will also receive direct experience under his professional guidance in our live online classroom. While Paul's work is known worldwide and access to his teachings are available in a number of schools around the globe, this program offers a unique expression of his works. His 50 years of accumulated knowledge have been refined bringing a heightened skillset to the development of becoming a professional herbalist. He has trained more than 400 clinical herbalists since 1996.

Students listen to Paul Bergner's audio recorded lectures as homework and then come to class where students will participate in exercises and discussions that provide valuable firsthand experience with practical applications in Materia medica, case assessment, clinical skills, therapeutic approaches, and the art of developing client practitioner relationships. The flipped curriculum offers a higher retention of learning while gaining insight from shared experiences and faculty feedback.

Heather Luna has been a student of Paul Bergner for over 20 years. She will facilitate the classroom setting and provide both insight and guidance based on her own experience of having applied the principles of vitalist medicine in her clinical practice since 1999. She is a dedicated teacher, a forever student, plant advocate, administrative director, and coordinator for community learning.

Course Curriculum

The topics listed below are Paul Bergner's audio recorded lectures that comprise the Advanced program course curriculum. There are a total 160 hours of audio that students will study. In addition to listening to the audio lectures, students will be completing over 150 hours in homework and projects outside of class time.

Interview Skills

- Interview Skills in the Vitalist Tradition
- Getting the Story Right
- Art of the Follow-up
- Healing as a Spiritual Path

Materia Medica & Formulation

- Advanced Herbal Actions and Formulation
- Herbal Pairing and Modular Formulation
- Herbal Safety
- Materia Medica Differentials
- Herbs for the Spiritual Heart

Case Analysis

- Intake and Pattern Assessment
- Case Analysis in the Vitalist Tradition
- Case Studies in Vitalist Herbalism

Infectious Disease

- Biofilms and Chronic Infections
- Viral Infections

Nutrition and Metabolism

- Nutrition in the Herbal Paradigm
- Systemic Inflammation, Food Intolerance & Autoimmunity
- Insulin Resistance
- Obesity: Ethics and Harms

Therapeutics

- Detoxification, Alteratives and the Liver
- Fatigue Therapeutics & Adaptogens
- Working with the Heavy Cannabis User
- Hypothyroid

General Enrollment Information

- You must have previous herbal education & training to apply (see Prerequisites).
- Prospective students must fill out an application for enrollment.
- There is a non-refundable \$50 application fee.
- Once your application is accepted there is a deposit required to hold your place in the program.
- You must be 18 years of age or older to attend classes.

Prerequisites

This program has prerequisite requirement of a minimum of 300 hours of training in Foundational Herbalism, having attended our *Footprints in Medical Herbalism* program or the equivalent. If you are not certain that your previous training qualifies you for our Advanced Program, please contact the school to inquire.

Academic Commitment

This program offers a rigorous study in the field of Advanced Herbalism. While class time is held live only 4 hours a week, homework and independent study hours average about 6 hours a week. A 90% class attendance and a completion of all program assignments is required in order to graduate.

Class Schedule 2025-26

See the Advanced Program Calendar at the end of this handbook for the full class schedule.

- First Day of Class: Wednesday, September 10, 2025
- Last Day of Class: Wednesday, May 27, 2026
- School Breaks: October 20-24, November 24-28, December 22-January 2, February 16-20, April 13-17

Course Hours & Certificates

The Advanced Herbalism in the Vitalist Tradition program is a total of 457 hours, 128 Class hours (online) plus 329 Independent Study hours (includes audio recorded lectures). Completion of this program grants students a certificate from both ACORN and NAIMH.

Tuition & Costs

Total Program Cost \$4600

- \$400 Tuition Deposit: counts towards tuition
- \$1200 NAIMH Course Materials: required digital files
- \$3000 Tuition Balance: see monthly payment plan below

Tuition Payment Plan

Tuition payments are billed on the 4th of the month. Contact the school to make custom payment arrangements. The Tuition Deposit, NAIMH Course Materials, and Tuition Payments are non-refundable.

Due upon Acceptance	On or Before 8/27/25	10/4/25	11/4/25	12/4/25	1/4/26	2/4/26	3/4/26	4/4/26	5/4/26
\$400 Tuition Deposit	\$1200 NAIMH Course Materials Payment	\$375 Tuition payment							

Acceptance

Here are the next steps once you are accepted into this program.

- 1. Your \$400 Tuition Deposit is due upon acceptance; we will send you an invoice via email.
- 2. Check your email for your Enrollment Packet. This has important documents that will need to be completed, signed, and returned promptly.
- 3. The \$1200 NAIMH Course Materials payment is due no later than 8/27/25. You will receive an email invoice to pay this amount as well.

How Class Works

Regular Classes

Our weekly classes will be held in real-time online using Zoom. We want to replicate the in-person classroom environment as much as possible so we can grow and connect as a group. Regular class times are Wednesdays 11:00 am - 4:00 pm PST, with a lunch break from 1:00 - 2:00 pm. Heather Luna is the primary classroom instructor. She will breakdown the course material in extensive detail, and show you how to apply these teachings to build an effective herbal practice. Paul Bergner joins our class as his schedule permits. He usually pops in to share key points, drop pearls of wisdom, and provide inspirational topics for discussion. If you are unable to attend the live Zoom classes, you may opt to watch the recording for attendance. See below for details.

Attendance by Recordings

In order to receive credit for attendance via recordings, you must turn in a copy of your class notes along with any questions you have from the class to demonstrate participation. Recordings will be uploaded to student drive files online for access and future reference. See the section under Attendance for complete details.

Homework

Self-Study/Audio files (NAIMH Course Materials)

Listening to Paul's recorded classes is an essential aspect of our herbal learning environment. His audio lectures are full of valuable information and experience that drives the entire program. You will listen to the assignment (audio file) on your own time and complete the given homework projects before the next class. The Advanced Program Course Materials is a library of digital files that will come as a download which includes: audio recorded lectures with Paul Bergner, notes and slides to accompany each lesson, data files, clinic forms, and PDF text references. We recommend saving these files to some type of external hard drive.

Google Drive Homework System

You will be assigned a Google Drive Homework Folder where you will submit all coursework.

Medicine Making Kits

You will receive medicine kits throughout the year with herbs to sample that are specific to topics we will be covering.

School Policies

School policies are in effect and held accountable by all school members participating in school related activities, whether held online or at in person events (such as workshops, herb walks, etc).

Violation of school policies may result in dismissal from the program.

Communications with the School

If you need assistance with payments, homework, attendance, or anything else please contact the school at herbalists@acornherbschool.com so we can help.

Non-Discrimination

The ACORN School of Herbal Medicine does not discriminate based on disability, race, religion, creed, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, transgender status, marital status, national origin, or ancestry.

Conduct

- We are committed to creating a safe space where every individual feels seen, heard, and valued.
- School members are expected to uphold the values of empathy, inclusion, and mutual respect towards other students and faculty members.
- If a student or faculty member does not feel safe within our school community, or an individual is concerned about the safety of another school member, please contact the school immediately to seek appropriate measures.

Confidentiality

- As a learning institution of the healing arts, school members often share personal experiences about their own healing journey within the classroom setting. These shares are to be recognized as private and confidential discussions for support and development as we learn and grow together.
- It is imperative to protect the confidentiality of our students and our staff. The identity of anyone who shares a personal story is not to be spread beyond the classroom. Everyone learns from each other's experiences. Personal shares can be shared outside the classroom if done so anonymously.

Complaints & Feedback

Complaints of any nature should be brought to the attention of the school so that we may address your grievances. Constructive feedback helps us to grow as a school community. Please send an email to: herbalists@acornherbschool.com We will address your concerns in a timely manner.

Disputes

We seek to maintain a positive learning environment. In the event a dispute should occur we promote open, clear, and honest communication among students and faculty to prevent misunderstandings. We acknowledge that suffering occurs on all sides of conflict. Mutual respect and empathetic discussion helps to maintain the integrity of our school values.

- In the event of a dispute please schedule a meeting with the director to seek resolution.
- If a dispute arises that involves more than one person, schedule a group meeting with the director for collaborative discussion. Please refrain from any further engagement on the matter until all parties are present so that mutual understanding may be achieved.
- If a resolution cannot be achieved through mutual discussion with the school director an appropriate third-party mediator may be asked to intercede to facilitate the safety and wellbeing of all school members.

Dismissal

A student may be dismissed for violations of school policy, as specified in this Student Handbook. A student also may be withdrawn from classes by ACORN if they do not participate in class requirements. When there are grounds for dismissal you will be notified in writing. You may accept the terms for dismissal, or you may request a meeting with the director to appeal your case.

Withdrawal from the Program/Refund Policy

If for whatever reason you need to withdraw from the program, please send an email to herbalists@acornherbschool.com and put "Withdraw from Program" in the subject line.

- Tuition Deposit: non-refundable.
- Tuition Monthly Payments: previously paid tuition is non-refundable. As soon as you withdraw from the program you will no longer be billed for tuition.
- NAIMH Course Materials: non-refundable.

Postponement of Start Date

In the event of postponement of the program start date, due to unforeseen circumstances, all students will be notified immediately via phone, text, and/or email. A new date will be set as soon as possible.

School Closures

ACORN may cancel or reschedule a class due to an unforeseen circumstance. If this happens students will be notified as soon as possible.

Requirements to Earn Certificate

- · You must attend class.
- · You must show up on time.
- You must complete ALL assigned coursework to earn a certificate, no exceptions.

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to arrive on time for class with proper materials and all assignments completed. An overall attendance rate of at least 90% is required to pass the Footprints Program, which means you can only miss 3 classes. As class discussion and answering questions is a major part of the live Zoom class, we encourage live attendance when possible. Contact the Director immediately if you are having difficulty meeting attendance requirements.

Absences

- Students are allowed 3 Absences without affecting attendance requirements. Students are still required to submit all assignments from all missed classes.
- Students with more than 3 Absences will be required to makeup those missed classes. For each missed class after the first 3, students are required to fulfill attendance requirements by watching the class recordings and submitting class notes – see the section on Attendance by Recordings below. Students are still required to submit all assignments from all missed classes.

Tardiness

- Students arriving more than 15 minutes late for 3 classes will be docked the equivalent of one full 3-hour class.
- Excessive tardiness will constitute a meeting with the Director.

Attendance by Recordings

- Students may watch the Zoom recordings if they are unable to join the live Zoom class.
- To receive attendance credit, you must watch the recorded class and submit a copy of your
- If you have questions after watching the recorded class, please email ACORN faculty at herbalists@acornherbschool.com

Assignments & Homework Policy

- All homework assignments are expected to be completed by their due date. This helps you participate in the next class. It is imperative to keep up with the pace of the classes, as each assignment prepares you for the next class.
- If for any reason you must turn in homework late, it must be completed by the end of each course in order to move on to the next course.
- ALL ASSIGNMENTS must be completed and submitted in order to receive a certificate.

Progress Reports

Footprints Program students will receive a digital progress report showing what assignments have been graded and which assignments are missing.

Payment Policy

We only accept credit and debit cards as payment. All payments are expected to be made by the due date given. Payments not received on time are subject to Late Fees, and students may be prohibited to attend class until payment has been made.

- Late Tuition Payments: Payment is considered late on the 7th day after the due date. ACORN charges a Late Fee for tuition payments received after this time.
- Late Fees for Late Payments: A late payment fee is assessed at \$10.00 per day until the payment is made. Late fees will be due at the same time as the past due payment.
- Credit Card Declined: If the credit card provided declines the student will receive a digital invoice that will be due within 7 days before Late Fees are assessed and further action is taken.
- Financial Hardship: If you experience a financial hardship that prevents you from making tuition payments, please contact the Director as soon as you know you cannot make your next payment. The Director can hear your case and try to work out a reasonable arrangement to make up payments and keep you enrolled.

Placement Assistance

ACORN does not offer employment placement assistance to graduates. We make no guarantee, expressed or implied, of future employment.

Next Program

Upon graduation of the Advanced Herbalism in the Vitalist Tradition program, you are now eligible to apply to our third-year program, Clinical Residency & Roundtable program. Please visit our website to learn more: https://www.acornherbschool.com



Advanced Herbalism in the Vitalist Tradition School Calendar 2025-26

Wednesdays 11 am – 4 pm PST

(morning class: 11 am - 1 pm / afternoon class: 2 - 4 pm)

September 2025									
Su	M	Τυ	W	Th	F	S			
	1	2	3	4	5	6			
7	8	9	10	11	12	13			
14	15	16	17	18	19	20			
21	22	23	24	25	26	27			
28	29	30							

October 2025									
Su	M	M Tu W Th F							
			1	2	3	4			
5	6	7	8	9	10	11			
12	13	14	15	16	17	18			
19	20	21	22	23	24	25			
26	27	28	29	30	31				

November 2025									
Su	M Tu W Th F S								
						1			
2	3	4	5	6	7	8			
9	10	11	12	13	14	15			
16	17	18	19	20	21	22			
23	24	25	26	27	28	29			
30									

	December 2025								
Su	M	Τυ	W	Th	F	S			
	1	2	3	4	5	6			
7	8	9	10	11	12	13			
14	15	16	17	18	19	20			
21	22	23	24	25	26	27			
28	29	30	31						

	January 2026									
Su	M	Τυ	W	Th	F	S				
				1	2	3				
4	5	6	7	8	9	10				
11	12	13	14	15	16	17				
18	19	20	21	22	23	24				
25	26	27	28	29	30	31				

	February 2026										
Su	M	Τυ	W	Th	F	S					
1	2	3	4	5	6	7					
8	9	10	11	12	13	14					
15	16	17	18	19	20	21					
22	23	24	25	26	27	28					

	March 2026								
Su	M	Τυ	W	Th	F	S			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
8	9	10	11	12	13	14			
15	16	17	18	19	20	21			
22	23	24	25	26	27	28			
29	30	31							

	April 2026									
Su	Μ	Τυ	W	Th	F	S				
			1	2	3	4				
5	6	7	8	9	10	11				
12	13	14	15	16	17	18				
19	20	21	22	23	24	25				
26	27	28	29	30						

	May 2026								
Su	M	Τυ	W	Th	F	S			
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3	4	5	6	7	8	9			
10	11	12	13	14	15	16			
17	18	19	20	21	22	23			
24	25	26	27	28	29	30			
31									

1st Day of School

Regular School Days

No School

Last Day of School