

February 20, 2013

TURTLE TRACKS

A WEEKLY EMAIL NEWSLETTER FOR THE VERMONT COMMONS SCHOOL COMMUNITY

UPCOMING EVENTS

February 25 – March 4

February Vacation

March 7

8th-Grade
Potluck 6-8 PM
@ Peter Gilmore's

March 19

Second Evening
of Readings
6-8 PM

March 22

Third Quarter
Ends

A Fresh Look at our Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles –by Mark Cline Lucey

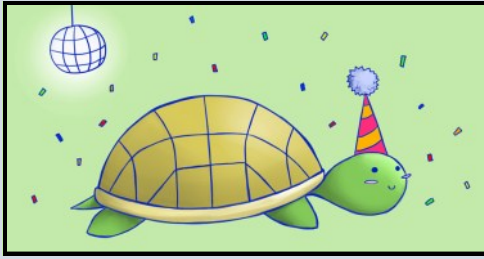
A powerful event took place on Sunday morning. A group of 32 students, faculty, parents & trustees gathered to take a collective look at the statements that define and guide us as a school. The VCS Mission, Vision, Guiding Principles and the Strategic Plan were written in 2009, but the Trustees felt there was sufficient cause to collectively revisit the concepts behind them. Chair of the Board of Trustees, Rebecca Lindy Coll, led the effort to organize Sunday's "VMS Retreat" and created an inclusive, appreciative process that allowed us to explore the factors and forces that give life and magic to VCS, and then to dream big about the future of the school. After exploring what we love about VCS, and what we hope for in the future, we took a close look at the Mission, Vision and Guiding Principles and asked ourselves if these documents reflect the themes that had emerged throughout the morning.

In a world that is changing so rapidly, schools must be on the front lines in preparing young people. It is inspiring and comforting to know that we have a Board of Trustees that asks us to constantly reassess and be mindful about our purpose and direction as a school.

Thank you everybody who attended and shared their experiences, their dreams, and their creativity! Thank you to Trustees: Rebecca Coll, Lisa Fargo, Brian Leffler, Craig Heindel, Mike Russell, Tina Mueller, Bob Hill Derrick Senior, and Kyler Robinson (via Skype); Students: Jordan Cannon, Henry Sadler, Gabe Mantegna, Mason Hill, Nora Hill, and Spencer Reed; Parents: Linda Gilpin, Laury Shea, Martha Maksym, Suzanne Mantegna, Bud Reed, Lee Mclsaac and Jeff Govoni; Faculty/Admin: Peter Gilmore, Peter Goff, Jessica Redmond, Joanna Easton, Jieru Wang, Cara Simone, Christie Beveridge, Bradley Materick, Ben Wang, and Mary Hamilton-Homer (via Skype).



Turtle Fest!



Due to the incredible feel good popularity of last year's 15th birthday party at the Shelburne Farms Coach Barn, we are considering making it an annual event.

There are two planning meetings when Mary Hamilton-Homer is back in town on March 20th at 5:30 pm and March 22nd at 7:45 a.m. **Whether this turtle takes off will depend on volunteer interest!**

If you are an interested parent, please email Mary at mhamiltonhomer@vermontcommons.org with your time preference. If you are an interested student, Mary will be in touch about a planning meeting during lunch when she is back in March, but still email your interest to her.

Volleyball News: Off the Courts –by Peter Goff



During Encounter Week, senior Co-Captain Mia Jager and I met with the director of the Vermont Principal's Association in Montpelier (the Enosburg and Burlington Athletic Directors were also present). He wanted to be sure that we were ready to move forward with the multi-year VPA recognition program. Mia did a great job of speaking for the hundreds of Vermont players, and the VPA decided to move forward with a proposal to the entire VPA Board of Directors. Two weeks later, sophomore Mikhal Yudien and I presented our proposal to the entire VPA Board (which included Athletic Directors and principals from all over the state). Mikhal spoke eloquently and passionately, and represented our team, school, and sport very well.



VPA unanimously granted Volleyball 'exhibition' status for the next two years. If we continue to grow the sport and run both a regular schedule of matches and a Championship event (which we've done for the past 5+ years), then we will be granted 'varsity' status. Essex, Randolph, Leland and Gray, MMU and Twin Valley have already committed to playing next year...and there are a half-dozen other schools who have already contacted me to set up organizational meetings, workshops, and clinics. This will mean little to nothing (outside of the expanded pool of competitors) to VCS in the next two years. If or when we are granted varsity status, this will mean that the VPA will take over the championship (logistically and financially) which VCS has been running. I have been asked by the current members of the Vermont Youth Volleyball Association to continue to take the lead as we move forward with the VPA.

Live Lessons from Taiwan –by Ben Wang



The 7th-grade Intro to the Chinese-speaking World class studied Chinese calligraphy this week with a teacher in Taiwan via Skype, continuing our exploration of Chinese history, philosophy, and language that all started with watching the movie *Hero*. Calligraphy is tied to martial arts and politics in the movie, and students chose characters such as "sword," "under the sky," "beauty," and "chaos" for their final pieces. The principles of calligraphy (ask a student about "The heart/chest contains the completed bamboo") flowed through each student, creating beautiful works of art.

Research & Service Strengthening Retreat: A Success!

Vermont Commons is deeply committed to place-based education, service learning, and ecological stewardship, and those values are manifested in the school's Research & Service Program. A committee of students, faculty, parents and trustees met on February 13th to discuss how to enhance the program over the next three years.

The mission of the Research & Service Program (R&S) is to go beyond the traditional disciplines, to go beyond the classroom walls, and to connect learning to community engagement and environmental stewardship in a fun, hands-on and rewarding way. Ultimately, the Research & Service experience teaches students that with knowledge comes responsibility, and they can and should take active roles in improving their communities. It was determined at Wednesday's meeting that while R&S is undoubtedly one of the hallmark programs of a VCS education, it will be important to develop guidelines to ensure students will have a consistently positive experience while participating in it.

Based on student surveys, R&S is most effective when students feel they are able to make a real, meaningful difference in the community. Students enjoyed the wide variety of service activities while having fun and working together. Conversely, the surveys stated that unsuccessful experiences were characterized by lackluster materials and service opportunities that were hard to accomplish.

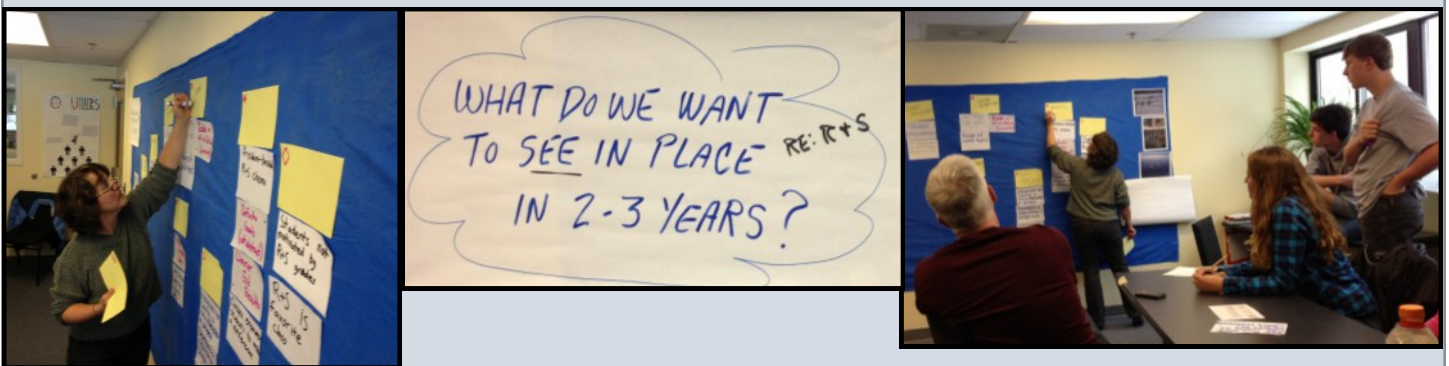
To address all concerns and create some guidelines for the future, the fifteen participants split into groups of three and catalogued what they believed to be most important factors enhancing R&S. The brainstorming culminated in the creation of seven categories:

- Thorough Planning, Preparedness & Authentic Student Voice/Leadership
- Diverse & Dynamic Options
- Trans-Disciplinary Team Teaching
- Empowering Students to Solve Problems
- Community Connections & Partnerships
- Public Recognition & Legacy
- Joy of Service

From there the group was tasked with narrowing down such broad categories into some criteria that VCS teachers could refer to when developing R&S classes in the future. After much deliberation, the students, faculty, and trustees came up with the following:

- Student Interest, Empowerment & Leadership
- Level of interaction of relationship with partner
- Validity/Feasibility
- Well-Planned

The process epitomized the best parts of VCS, not just the notion of faculty and students interacting on equal ground to create something new, but the knowledge that though there have been unsuccessful R&S experiences, any negatives are easily resolved with a group that cares enough to try. "Not only am I thrilled to have this set of agreements about how we should move forward," said Mark Cline Lucey, director of the Research & Service Program, "but I am psyched about the...creative and inclusive process that...brought everybody's voices together."



College Counseling Corner –by Sarah Soule

Gap Year Fair - Sunday, March 10, 2013

Sponsored by www.usagapyearfairs.org - this special program will be held at South Burlington HS on Dorset Street beginning at 1:00 p.m. Learn more about taking a year off between high school and college and meet with representatives from programs.

College Pathways - Saturday, March 16, 2013

Sponsored by VSAC and held on the campus of St. Michael's College in Colchester, this day long event is a great program for our sophomores and juniors, and their parents as they explore higher education and college counseling options. Meet with admission and financial aid officers and spend a great day as you navigate the road to college! To register, go to www.vvac.org or call 655-9602.

Consider Canada College Fair - Thursday, April 4, 2013

This will be an excellent opportunity to meet with admissions officers from our 'neighbors to the north!' The College Fair will be held at South Burlington High School from 7-9 p.m. Recent VCS graduates are attending the University of British Columbia, Bishops University, Queens University and Acadia University, all in Canada. Check it out!

College Fair - Monday, April 8, 2013

We will be taking all VCS juniors to Champlain Valley Union High School in Hinesburg to attend a area college fair during the lunch hour to meet with over 100 college and university representatives.

This Week in Photos



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