



VERMONT COMMONS SCHOOL

ENGAGING STUDENTS WITH THE WORLD

Sixth Grade at Vermont Commons School

The Heart of our Sixth Grade

Vermont Commons School offers a dedicated sixth grade with an emphasis on interdisciplinary learning and community engagement. Young students flourish in our uniquely collaborative, challenging, cheerful learning environment bolstered by a classroom student-teacher ratio of 10-1, guaranteeing personalized attention for each student. Our innovative approach begins with specialized 6th-grade teachers and their core interdisciplinary Language Arts/Social Studies and Science/Math classes, while the broader Vermont Commons School faculty provide arts, world language, wellness, and study skills classes. Sixth-grade students need a nurturing, rich, and invigorating environment not limited to four classroom walls, a need recognized by our caring and watchful faculty and embodied in our tireless practice of engaging students directly with the world.

To that end, Vermont Commons School faculty facilitate learning through both local and global partnerships, allowing students the advantage of many minds and perspectives in our classes. Especially at the middle school level, faculty integrate field trips in order to bring subject matter to life. Sixth graders also participate in our flagship programs--Encounter Weeks and the Research and Service program--both of which promote leadership and teamwork. The first two Encounter Weeks are sixth grade specific, and the third integrates the sixth graders with the other middle school students. These weeks of outdoor experiential education are designed to introduce sixth graders gradually to the overnight outings that are a hallmark of Vermont Commons School's rigorous Encounter Week program. In the Research and Service class, the students--together with their sixth grade core teachers--work with a community partner to explore a problem in depth and contribute to solving it over the course of several months of service.

Extracurriculars

6th graders may participate in all activities and sports offered at VCS; where age groupings are appropriate (such as in contact sports), they participate as part of our middle school teams. Currently, Vermont Commons offers Volleyball, Soccer, Cross Country Running, Basketball, and Ultimate Frisbee, as well as an annual school Theatre Production, Student Senate, Math Team, Documentary Film Committee, literary magazine, and a host of other clubs and opportunities.

Advisory and Mentoring

Each sixth grade teacher will have a maximum of five 6th graders in their advisory section. Advisory sets aside time specifically for assessing student's emotional, academic, and social well-being. After the students' first year, our sixth grade team will make recommendations for which faculty member might be the best match for a student's middle and high school years.

Homework and Grading

Sixth grade students should expect a maximum of one hour of homework a night. Students need family time and often have committed to extracurricular obligations; the quantity of homework at Vermont Commons

reflects our support of such commitments, as well as a recognition that not all students come from a homework-providing school environment and need to be nurtured towards a regular practice of work outside the school day. All grading at Vermont Commons School begins with constant written and verbal feedback to ensure student growth and culminates with a 100 point scale. Students and parents receive formal narrative comments on student performance in each academic area, every marking period, and they also have digital access anytime to RenWeb, our online grading and communications portal.

Middle and High School Dynamics

Older students act as mentors and role models for our younger students in select settings, such as community-wide morning meetings, lunch times, and Physical Education classes. In other settings, in recognition of developmental abilities and differences, we intentionally create divisions based on age. For instance, in social gatherings and dances middle and high school students partake in separate events.

Afterschool

Our academic day unfolds between 8:30 and 3:30. Parents are required to arrive and pick up their child by 3:30 or partake in after school programming that requires a 4:30-5:00 p.m. pick-up time. Recognizing that 6th graders need and crave structure, we provide watchful adult presence and learning opportunities during all hours that your child is in our care. We are currently in the expansion stage of our afterschool program with more to follow in the 2015-16 school year.

A Brief Summary of our 6th-Grade Courses:

- Language Arts/Social Studies: Through exploration of maps and physical geography and how local, state and national governments work and interplay with one another, students connect to human systems through project-based learning. Through readings of global short stories and mythology, students learn how civics and geography impact and are impacted by people and the human experience globally, as well as where such experience is similar and different. In this interdisciplinary course, students work on creative and formal writing, critical thinking, and oral communication skills.
- Math/Science: In the first semester of this interdisciplinary course students explore the scientific method through experimentation, data gathering & analysis and scientific communication. Ratios, proportions, probability, and statistics serve as tools to investigate the world around us. In the second semester, ecological cycles, ecosystems and food web analysis motivate the study of functions, algebraic functions and geometry.
- World Languages: In this year-long course (previously taught in the 7th grade), one semester is dedicated to Chinese language and culture and one to Spanish language and culture. At the end of 6th grade, students elect to pursue a course of study in Spanish or Chinese for the coming years.
- Art/Music: In art, both two dimensional and three dimensional processes are instructed in the studio, and students are introduced to artists in history that relate to their respective studio applications. In Music students begin with digital composition tools to create their own pieces, in the process of which they learn basic music theory; they then select continuing in vocal, instrumental, or further composition work.
- Study Skills and Wellness: In the first semester, a study skills course is taught by the Middle School Director and the 6th grade team. In the second semester, a wellness course is taught by the Middle School Director and the School Counselor and includes social and emotional learning, health, conflict resolution, and other developmentally appropriate topics.