

Vermont Commons School Employee Handbook

2014- 2016



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About This Handbook

This employee handbook provides you with important information about Vermont Commons School's benefits, policies, and practices. Please read it thoroughly and save it for future reference. This replaces and supersedes any previous version of the handbook.

The guidelines in this handbook do not deal with every possible circumstance and are to be implemented in light of common sense and sound judgment. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask the Business Manager. All employees should be aware that violation of school policies and procedures may subject the employee to corrective action, up to and including termination of employment.

While Vermont Commons School strives to keep all faculty and staff fully apprised regarding policy and procedure changes, the school reserves the right to modify the policies and practices outlined in this handbook at any time, based on the needs of the school and at the sole discretion of the Head of School. Accordingly, there may be occasions in which school policy changes prior to the distribution of written notice to all employees.

Please understand that Vermont Commons School, as an employer in the state of Vermont, must comply with federal, state, and local laws affecting both employees and employers. In doing so, we realize that there may be sections and policies in this handbook that may not feel like the school or environment with which you are familiar. The school leadership is sensitive to, understands, and acknowledges this potential feeling among employees. We appreciate your understanding of our need to be in compliance with the law and thank you for your support in helping us operate effectively in the best interests of our students, families, Board members, faculty, and community members at large.

A Welcome Message from Head of School Dexter Mahaffey

Welcome to the Vermont Commons School Employee Handbook. If you are a new employee, we are very glad that you have decided to join us. If you are a returning employee, it is a great pleasure to welcome you back to what promises to be another fine year in the growth and development of the school and our students.

Vermont Commons is a school where we help students learn the content and skills necessary to succeed in college, encounter the world around them in local and international spheres, and develop the character and social understanding it takes to be engaged citizens in our modern world. In short, we help them be the best they can be.

As faculty and employees at VCS this is our charge, and to achieve our goals we need sensible, consistent, and legally appropriate policies. This Handbook, and the Faculty Guide that goes with it, are the result of many hours of work by faculty, administrators, board members, and volunteers invested in the welfare of the institution. We all are dedicated to helping our school be the best it can be as well.

As you familiarize yourself with this handbook, please understand that it is intended to be a guide to our school's employment, benefits, administrative policies, practices, and philosophies. It is not meant to detail each and every standard or practice of the school, but rather to serve as a reference for the main aspects of daily life at the school and a larger vision of the school's ideals and expectations. If you have any questions about the information contained in this handbook, please do not hesitate to check with the Business Manager or speak directly with me at any time.

With warmest regards,

Dexter P. Mahaffey, Ph.D.
Head of School

Vermont Commons School Mission Statement

Vermont Commons School students experience a unique blend of academics and global immersion, master fundamental academic disciplines, grasp the profound interdependence of the natural and human systems they inhabit, and graduate with the values, knowledge, skills and commitment necessary to become ethical and engaged ecological citizens.

VCS Guiding Principles

- We are all part of, responsible for, and have a direct impact upon our world. Productive citizenship requires that students thoroughly understand how their local and global communities work and how individuals and communities affect each other.
- Understanding the relationships between humans and the world they share is the primary goal of education. For students to appreciate their place and role in their environment – and respond with wonder and confidence – their learning experiences must be embedded in multiple human and natural contexts.
- To thrive in an age in which complexity and opportunity are created at an ever-accelerating pace, students must become skilled in a balanced mix of the language arts, mathematics, and physical, natural and social sciences, as well as artistic, musical and athletic expression.
- Technological understanding and competence are increasingly essential for communication, competitiveness, and success in the information age.
- Students must interact directly with their environment in order to experience and appreciate the real-world value of their skills and knowledge. With the world as classroom, lab and shop, lessons are forever linked to vivid personal learning experiences.
- Respect for self and others, enjoyment of diversity, personal commitment to equality, devotion to stewardship, and acceptance of responsibility are essential pillars of the Vermont Commons education and values system.
- Recognizing that the relationships between students and adults form the fabric of the Vermont Commons experience, daily life in our school is organized to promote healthy, positive, mutually enjoyable interactions among students, teachers and staff members.

SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

Vermont Commons School is governed by an independent Board of Trustees made up of 11 members gathered from a pool of parents of present students (never more than 50%), parents of alumni, community members and a faculty liaison. The Board has 4 officers and a variety of committees, some of which are standing committees and some of which are formed on an ad hoc basis to meet the needs of the strategic plan. Board members serve terms of three years, which are renewable one time for an additional three years.

The Board's Role

The Board is charged with ensuring the long-term, mission-based, sustainable success and viability of the school. As such, it is concerned with the needs of the school over several generations; therefore, its focus is setting the strategic direction of the school. The Board does not manage the day-to-day or tactical operations of the school. The Board hires a School Head and delegates day-to-day managerial responsibility for the entire enterprise to the Head, within the general parameters and principles that it has established. The Board meets regularly to set policy and to monitor progress of the school's strategic plan.

Board of Trustee Members

Brian Leffler, Chair

Rebecca Coll

Craig Heindel, Secretary

Heather Moore, Faculty Liaison

Kyler Robinson

George Starbuck

Geoff Govoni

Suzanne Mantegna

Derrick Senior

Tina Mueller

SECTION I

EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

Vermont Commons School believes that each individual is entitled to equal employment opportunity without regard to race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status as well as ancestry, sexual orientation, gender identity, place of birth or physical or mental condition ... or any other characteristic protected under federal, state, or local anti-discrimination laws. The school's equal employment opportunity practices extend to recruitment, hiring, selection, compensation, benefits, transfer, promotion, training, discipline, and all other terms, conditions, and privileges of employment.

All employees are responsible for complying with the school's equal employment opportunity policy. Anyone found to have engaged in any unlawful discrimination will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Filing a Discrimination Claim with the School

If you believe you have been subjected to any form of unlawful discrimination, please promptly submit a complaint to the School Head. (If the object of your complaint is the School Head, you should submit the complaint to the Chair of the Board of Trustees.

Your complaint should be specific and should include facts, the names of individuals involved, and the names of any witnesses, if applicable.

The school will promptly undertake a thorough investigation and will attempt to resolve the issue. Those investigating for the school will preserve the confidentiality of facts and identities as much as practical. Those making a complaint or participating in an investigation are expected to maintain appropriate confidentiality and to act professionally and discreetly at all times. The school will not retaliate against any employee for filing a complaint or for participating in an investigation in good faith.

ADA/Americans with Disabilities Act

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and applicable state law, Vermont Commons School will not unlawfully discriminate against qualified applicants or employees with disabilities who can perform the essential functions of their jobs with or without reasonable accommodations. The school will not discriminate based on disability or perceived disability in hiring, promotion, discharge, compensation, job training, benefits, classification, referral, or any other aspects, terms, or conditions of employment.

In accordance with the law, it is the school's policy to provide such qualified applicants and employees with reasonable accommodations, except where such accommodations would impose an undue hardship on the school. Any employee who requires an accommodation to perform the essential functions of the job should contact the School Head and request such an accommodation.

The individual with the disability should be prepared to discuss what type of accommodation is needed to perform the job. You should be aware that dialogue regarding the accommodation requested may occur. In collaboration with the candidate or employee, the school will make every effort to identify and implement an accommodation that is reasonable and will not impose an undue hardship.

Filing a Discrimination Claim with the School

If you believe you have been subjected to any form of unlawful discrimination, please promptly submit a complaint to the School Head. If the object of your complaint is the School Head, you should submit the complaint to the Chair of the Board of Trustees. Your complaint should be specific and should include facts, the names of individuals involved, and the names of any witnesses, if applicable.

The school will promptly undertake a thorough investigation and will attempt to resolve the issue. Those investigating for the school will preserve the confidentiality of facts and identities as much as practical. Those making complaints are expected to maintain appropriate confidentiality as well and to act professionally and discreetly at all times. The school will not retaliate against any employee for filing a complaint or for participating in an investigation in good faith.

UNLAWFUL HARASSMENT (INCLUDING SEXUAL HARASSMENT)

Vermont Commons School is committed to providing a work environment free of unlawful harassment. The school's policy prohibits sexual harassment and harassment based on race, gender, sexual orientation, color, ethnicity, religion, national origin, disability, genetic information, age, military status, sexual orientation, or any other basis protected by federal, state, or local law or ordinance or regulation. (See the school's Equal Employment Opportunity and Non-Discrimination Policy elsewhere in this handbook). All such harassment is unlawful.

The school's Policy Against Unlawful Harassment applies to all persons involved in the operation of the school and prohibits unlawful harassment by or toward any employee of the school, including administration, faculty, and staff as well as supervisors and co-workers. The school will also take all reasonable steps to prevent or eliminate harassment by or toward non-

employees—including students, guests, visitors, vendors, suppliers, donors, volunteers, and anyone else who may have job-related contact with our employees.

Prohibitions

All unlawful harassment is prohibited and includes, but is not limited to, the following behavior:

- Verbal conduct such as epithets, derogatory jokes or comments, slurs, or unwanted sexual advances, invitations, or comments
- Visual conduct such as derogatory and/or sexually oriented posters, photography, cartoons, drawings, or gestures
- Physical conduct such as assault, unwanted touching, blocking normal movement or interfering with work because of sex, race, or any other protected basis
- Threats and demands to submit to sexual requests as a condition of continued employment or to avoid some other loss and offers of employment benefits in return for sexual favors
- Retaliation for having reported or threatened to report harassment

This policy applies to all phases of employment (whether on- or off-campus, and whether it occurs during or after regular business hours), including, but not limited to, recruiting, testing, hiring, upgrading, promotion, demotion, transfer, layoff, termination, rates of pay, benefits, and selection for training.

Filing a Harassment Complaint With the School

If you believe that you have been subjected to or have observed any form of unlawful harassment, provide a complaint, preferably written, to your supervisor or the Head of School. If the School Head is the object of your complaint, or you feel uncomfortable for any reason reporting to him or her, please direct your complaint to the President of the Board of Trustees. You should report your complaint as soon as possible. Your complaint should be specific and should include the names of individuals involved and the names of any witnesses.

In addition, when supervisors are made aware of conduct that violates or may violate this policy, they must report any and all instances to:

Dexter P. Mahaffey, Ph.D., Head of School
Vermont Commons School
75 Green Mountain Dr.
So. Burlington, VT 05403

802 865-8084

or, if the claim involves the School Head, to the Chair of the Board of Trustees:

Brian Leffler
390 Terrace Drive
Williston, Vermont 05945

(802) 868-6198

Additionally, there is a complaint process at the state and federal employment discrimination enforcement agencies which are as follow:

State of Vermont Attorney General's Office
109 State St.
Montpelier, VT 05602

888 745-9195
802 828-3665

and

Equal Opportunity Commission
John F. Kennedy Federal Government Center, Rm 475
Boston, MA 02203
617 565-3200 or 1-800-669-4000

Investigations

The school will undertake an effective, thorough, timely, and objective investigation of the harassment allegations promptly upon receiving a complaint or becoming aware of alleged harassment. **The school encourages all employees to report any incidents of harassment prohibited by this policy immediately so that complaints can be quickly and fairly resolved.**

All complaints will be handled as confidentially as possible and information will be disclosed only as it is necessary to complete the investigation and resolve the matter.

Consequences

If the school determines that unlawful harassment has occurred, effective remedial action will be taken in accordance with the circumstances involved. Any employee determined by the school to be responsible for unlawful harassment will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including termination. Appropriate action will also be taken to deter future harassment.

Non-Retaliation

There will be no retaliation against any employee who brings a complaint in good faith under the Unlawful Harassment Policy or who honestly assists in investigating such a complaint, even if the investigation produces insufficient evidence that there has been a violation, or if the charges cannot be proven.

Bad Faith Claims

Disciplinary action may be taken against individuals reporting a claim in bad faith. “Bad faith” does not mean a claim that the complainant believes is valid but is later determined to be invalid. Rather, bad faith is meant to include individuals who submit claims that they know to be false or erroneous, for the purpose of hurting someone or damaging his/her reputation or other similar negative purposes (such as for their own personal gain).

Section II

EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

AT-WILL EMPLOYMENT AND CONTRACTS

At-Will Employment

All employees work for the school on an at-will basis. “At-will” employment means that either the employee or the employer may terminate the employment relationship at any time, with or without notice, for any reason at all. Nothing in this handbook or in any document or policy statement limits the right of either the school or the employee to terminate employment at will.

No representative of the school, other than the Head of School, may alter the at-will status of any employee. The School Head may alter that status only through a written document, signed by the Head of School (or his/her designate) that expressly states that the employment is not at will.

Employment Agreements

For all employees who have been offered and have signed an employment agreement, the terms of your employment are governed by the employment agreement, supplemented by the policies and procedures of this handbook, as specified by the employment agreement. In any conflict between the terms of the employment contract and the policies of this handbook, the terms of the employment agreement will prevail.

Employment Agreement Cycle and Timing

Employees who are offered and sign employment agreements with the school should be aware that these agreements are ordinarily for a one-year term. There is no requirement on the part of the school to offer an agreement to the employee in following years, and both parties are free to negotiate and pursue future employment on an annual basis. The school reserves the right to make individual decisions about agreement offers on an annual basis.

The school recognizes the need for both the school and its employees to be able to plan and anticipate their employment needs in a timely, predictable manner—to provide continuity for those who will be returning to the school in the fall, and to provide opportunity for those who will not be returning to seek other employment on a timely basis. For this reason, the school uses the following general schedule with regard to agreement renewals.

By March 1st, Vermont Commons School provides employment offers to full-time faculty and staff whom it is inviting to return for the following academic year. Faculty members who are not being invited to return ordinarily will be notified privately at approximately this time. (Please

note that notification may occur at another, later time, depending on the circumstances surrounding the non-renewal decision.)

By March 15th, employees who choose to accept the school's offer are asked to sign and return their new employment agreements. Extensions may be granted by the Head of School only.

Positions that are not accepted ordinarily will then be posted internally and externally and the recruiting process will begin. See the school's Job Posting policy for more details.

All parties are reminded that as a matter of law and ethics, signed agreements are considered legally binding. Therefore, employees who have signed an agreement for the following school year are expected to fulfill the terms of the agreement. Any employee who is uncertain about returning for the following year, is asked to discuss this with the Head of School prior to signing the contract, so that the commitments being made by signing can be discussed.

A variety of other circumstances—such as increasing, decreasing, or shifting enrollment demand, changing of curriculum or programs, etc.—may impact the timing and renewal or non-renewal of contracts. Individual employees will be notified of these circumstances if relevant to the timing, deferral, or declination of a renewal offer.

EMPLOYMENT CLASSIFICATIONS

All employees will be designated as either full-time or part-time, and their positions will be designated as either exempt or non-exempt.

Full-time and Part-time

Employees regularly scheduled to work 40 or more hours per week will be considered full-time employees. All other employees will be considered part-time. Only full-time employees are eligible for medical and short-term disability benefits beyond salary. Responsibilities for full and part-time faculty are described in greater detail in the Faculty Handbook.

Non-Exempt and Exempt

Based on the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and corresponding state regulations, all positions will be designated either "exempt" or "non-exempt."

Non-exempt positions are eligible for overtime pay and employees in these positions must record their hours worked on a daily basis, using the timesheet (or similar record-keeping process) provided by the school.

Exempt positions are not eligible for overtime pay. Exempt positions are paid on a salaried basis, and the amount of pay generally does not vary based on the number of hours worked during the week.

Please see the Business Manager with any questions regarding the classification of your position.

IMMIGRATION LAW COMPLIANCE

Vermont Commons School is committed to employing only individuals who are authorized to work in the United States. Vermont Commons School does not unlawfully discriminate on the basis of citizenship or national origin.

In compliance with the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, within three days of beginning employment (not necessarily the day they sign their first contract), each new employee must complete the Employment Eligibility Verification Form I-9, and present the proper documentation establishing identity and employment eligibility. Employees who do not comply with these regulations will not be allowed to continue employment, in accordance with federal law.

Employees with questions regarding this policy are encouraged to contact the Business Manager.

PAY

Work Week and Overtime Pay

Non-exempt positions are eligible for overtime pay at a rate of 1.5 times regular pay for all hours worked in excess of 40 in one week.

The school's work week (for purposes of calculating overtime) runs from 12:00 a.m. on Sunday to 11:59 p.m. on Saturday.

Overtime must be approved in advance by the Head of School or Business Manager.

Pay Periods

All employees are paid on a semi-monthly basis.

Pay Advances

The school does not provide pay advances to employees.

Pay Roll Deductions

The stub of an employee's payroll check lists all payroll deductions. Certain deductions are required by law and others are determined by the employee's participation in benefits plans and similar programs. Payroll deductions are made in equal installments from each payroll check.

Required Withholding

- **Federal Income Tax**—This deduction is computed from Internal Revenue Service tax tables, based on the number of exemptions claimed by the employee on the Employee's Withholding Allowance Certificate (W-4 form). If the employee wishes to change the number of exemptions or requests additional withholdings, a new form must be completed and submitted to the Business Office.
- **Withholding of State Income Tax**—This deduction is computed from state tax tables, based on the number of exemptions claimed by the employee on the W-4 form.
- **Federal Social Security and Medicare Tax**—This deduction is computed by a percentage of the gross pay. A portion of this amount is for Social Security and the remainder is for Medicare.
- **Temporary Unemployment Benefits (SUI)**—This deduction is computed on a yearly wage limit set by the state unemployment commission.

Voluntary Withholding

The following payroll deductions are based on the employee's participation in these plans or programs:

- American Funds Simple IRA retirement plan
- Delta Dental Program

All questions pertaining to pay and tax withholdings should be referred to the Business Office.

Annual W-2 Statement

A statement of deductions and earnings (IRS Form W-2) for the preceding calendar year is issued each January, no later than the last business day of the month, as required by law. If your employment with the school terminates prior to January, your W-2 form will be mailed to the last address on record at the school.

SECTION III

EMPLOYEE CONDUCT

IN SCHOOL CONDUCT

Attendance and Punctuality

To maintain a safe and productive work environment for our employees and academic environment for our students, Vermont Commons School expects all employees to be reliable and punctual in reporting for work. Faculty members, staff, and administrators are required to be present on campus by 8:15 a.m. on school days, and are expected to remain until at least 4:00 p.m. in order to provide students with extra help as needed. Rotating closing duties will require faculty to remain to close the building until 5 pm.

Call-in Procedure

In instances when the employee cannot avoid being late to work or is unable to work as scheduled, the employee must notify his/her immediate supervisor and the school receptionist in advance, when possible, of the tardiness or absence.

Leaving Campus

If an employee must be off-campus during the regular school day, the employee must sign out and back in at the Front Office.

Consequences

Poor attendance and excessive tardiness are disruptive to the effective operation of the school. Both circumstances are considered a serious violation of school policy and may lead to corrective action, up to and including termination of employment.

After-hours Events

Most employees are required to attend various evening and weekend school events as part of their regular job functions. The employee should consult with his/her immediate supervisor, or the appropriate administrator or department head, to determine which functions the employee is expected to attend.

Dress Code

During the school day and at any school function, the employee is expected to set appropriate examples for the student body and present a professional appearance. The school's policy for students, faculty, and staff is simply that clothing be neat, clean, and appropriate to the program of the day. Please use your better judgment at the school, at off-campus events and field trips, and when meeting with parents. We encourage our faculty and staff to model proper dress for our students and families. Remember that we are all ambassadors for our school.

Religious Observances

Vermont Commons School supports all employees in observing their own religious beliefs and practices, so long as such observations or absences can be reasonably accommodated and do not place an undue burden on the operation of the school. If an employee needs to take earned vacation time or unpaid time off for a recognized religious observance which is not one of Vermont Commons School's holidays, speak with your supervisor or the Head of School.

Communication with the Media

There may be times when you are contacted by the press or other media with questions relating to Vermont Commons School. While maintaining a friendly and gracious tone, any such calls should be referred to the School Head or the Administrator on Duty without comment. This is necessary so that the school may present itself to the public with one voice, especially at times of crisis or controversy. Please be sure to follow up immediately and let the Head of School or Administrator on Duty know that an inquiry by the media was made to you. Additionally, no member of the faculty or staff should contact any media outlets in the role of representative of the school or using the school's name in order to establish one's authority without previously contacting the Head of School.

INTER-PERSONAL CONDUCT

A key element of Vermont Commons School's approach to student character development is for our faculty and staff to serve as role models for mature, caring behavior. As a visible manifestation of this role, all employees are expected to conduct themselves with dignity and respect at all times.

- Offer to help other staff members and be willing to be helped by others (e.g., sitting down to listen, offering or receiving a teaching idea, etc.).
- Support in public, in private, and in practice any decision arrived at by the administration despite your personal objections.

- Offer differences of opinion by speaking and writing honestly and carefully, by listening fully, and by choosing the appropriate place for doing so.
- Refrain from criticizing students, colleagues, parents, administrators, or Board members; gently stop other teachers' or students' criticism of another person.
- Work with a spirit of continuous improvement toward colleagues' personal professional development, in their specific positions, and for the school as a whole.
- Be alert and willing to act to protect the physical assets of the school and the general safety of fellow employees and students entrusted to the school's care.
- Participate openly in faculty/staff meetings and forums; volunteering to assist or take responsibility in areas of need.

Faculty and Staff Responsibilities

Most rooms on campus are the direct responsibility of an individual teacher or staff member. Spaces shared by all (such as hallways, restrooms, common areas, and outdoor gathering places) are the responsibility of *everyone*. Creating and maintaining a supportive, safe, and attractive environment for learning and growth is our *common responsibility* and our vital commitment.

Negative behavior by students—including verbal or physical bullying or attack, dishonesty, rudeness, or destruction of personal or community property—cannot be tolerated. Each of these diminishes trust within the community and must be dealt with promptly and clearly whenever and wherever it is observed by faculty and staff. Sound self-discipline is our hope and aim for each student, and so most often our role is to create student awareness of common sense, safety, and appropriate behaviors. Sometimes this means you will need to intervene in a situation you see on campus. You will always be supported when doing so. Do not let concerns with “stepping on toes” or “crossing the line” into others’ responsibilities stop or slow you when you see negative behavior going unaddressed. Our first responsibility—to a safe and appropriate learning environment—must be honored. Accordingly, all faculty and staff are expected to be fully knowledgeable of the Student Code of Conduct.

Communication and Open Door Policy

Open communication is a central element of Vermont Commons School’s culture and values. Supervisors and employees should mutually strive to develop and maintain good working relationships. The school encourages open and honest dialogue about school procedures, work

standards, and performance—both formally (during the performance evaluation process) and informally (during the regular course of daily operations).

Vermont Commons School believes that most issues are best resolved directly between the individuals involved. If an issue arises, employees should attempt to first discuss the issue with the person involved. **Please note:** a specific exception to this process pertains to issues of harassment or discrimination. For issues of that nature, please see the complaint reporting procedure described in the Harassment policy.

If direct dialogue is not successful, the employee may consult directly with his/her immediate supervisor. The supervisor's responsibility is to meet with the employee in a timely and professional manner to discuss the situation. Supervisors should consider reasonable solutions that would remedy the situation consistent with school policy.

If this does not provide full resolution, the employee may direct the concern to the School Head. Depending on the circumstances and issues involved, the School Head will speak with parties involved, investigate as appropriate, and determine a resolution of the matter.

If the employee's concern involves the School Head directly, the employee may direct his/her concern to Chair of the Board of Trustees.

Harassment or Discrimination Concerns

If at any time during your employment with the school you have a concern regarding a situation of potential sexual or other harassment or discrimination, please see the reporting procedure outlined in the Equal Opportunity and Non-Harassment section of this handbook. You are strongly encouraged to report your concern at the earliest time, so that it may be addressed and resolved promptly, for the betterment of the school community and the individuals involved.

Drug-Free Workplace

Vermont Commons School is committed to providing a work environment for each employee and learning environment for each student where safety, clear thinking, and productivity must be prominent. Substance abuse—whether manifested as the abuse or misuse of prescription or illegal drugs or alcohol—is not consistent with the maintenance of this environment. It also is contrary to the need for faculty and staff to serve as role models for the students, and thus will not be tolerated.

An employee found to possess, use, manufacture, sell, purchase, or distribute any illegal drug or any prescription drug (other than in accordance with a proper prescription), or found to be under the influence of any such substance while on school property, during his/her work hours, or while he/she is on school business, will be subject to employment separation.

Alcohol at School-Sponsored Events

Vermont Commons School traditionally serves alcohol at a limited number of employee events during the year (such as the holiday party), as well as at parent and volunteer events (such as the annual auction) where employees are ordinarily present. At these times, employees may partake of the alcohol served, but may only do so in moderation, being careful to maintain sobriety at all times. At no time may an employee or other member of the school community act as a conduit to provide alcohol to underage students.

Confidential Assistance with Substance Abuse

The school recognizes that substance abuse may involve physical and/or emotional conditions which are treatable as such. The school would prefer to assist an employee in a non-disciplinary context and an employee is free to seek help on a confidential basis by contacting the School Head. Such a request should be made before any established policies and procedures have been violated. Substance abuse or dependency shall not be recognized as an excuse for unsatisfactory performance, or inappropriate or illegal behavior.

General Policy Questions

If an employee has questions about any school policies and how they are applied, he/she is encouraged to contact the Business Manager.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS AND PARENTS

In joining the Vermont Commons School community, you accept a responsibility for all Vermont Commons School students. While not all of our jobs involve direct contact with students in the classroom, we all serve as models for them. We maintain open lines of communication, establish rapport, and build *esprit de corps* by attending assemblies, athletic events, plays, and concerts; eating with students; and making the first friendly comment.

Relationships with Students

In a school such as VCS, students may develop strong emotional attachments to faculty and staff. Our role in guiding students toward growth as happy, healthy adults and lifelong learners is one of the most rewarding aspects of our work at Vermont Commons School. However, this relationship must always be understood and carried out in its proper context.

It is never appropriate for a faculty or staff member to enter into a romantic or sexual relationship of any kind with a student, regardless of whether the student may seek to initiate the relationship or may consider it consensual.

Violating the trust of students—and their parents—in this way is one of the most serious offenses that one can commit against a student and against the school community as a whole. Accordingly, violation of this policy will result in serious corrective action, up to and including termination of employment.

Acceptance of Gifts from Students or Parents

From time to time, faculty and staff may be offered gifts by grateful students, parents, or other family members of students. We do not want to discourage the kindness of our students. However, due to the potential for conflicts of interest (with regard to grading, student promotions, awards, etc.) as well as the potential for inappropriate “competition” among parent gift-givers, faculty and staff members are not permitted to accept gifts that are reasonably estimated to be worth in excess of \$100.00. For example: A gift certificate to a bookstore may be accepted; an all-expenses-paid vacation and use of a summer house may not be accepted.

All gifts from students or parents that appear to exceed the aforementioned limit must be reported promptly to the School Head.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Acceptable Use of Internet, Email and Network Resources

Computers, computer files, internet lines, the email system, and software furnished to Employees are the School’s property. The school makes e-mail and Internet access available to employees, as appropriate for their position. E-mail and Internet usage are an important communications and learning tools and should be used *primarily* for school business and instructional purposes. However, *limited* personal use of these resources is authorized so long as such use is occasional, of reasonable duration, does not adversely affect employee performance, and does not violate state or federal laws or compromise intellectual property rights (e.g., briefly checking a weather, travel, or sports Web site at lunch to get updated reports, scores, etc.).

- **Purpose**

E-mail and Internet usage, like all computer resources at our school, are tools for educating our students and facilitating the operation of the school. This policy outlines several key principles with regard to personal usage and expectations of privacy when using school-provided e-mail accounts and Internet resources. Its key purpose is to maintain the safety and security of the school and all of its employees, students, and

community members. Please keep in mind that everything you send using your school e-mail account is a reflection of yourself as a professional and as a representative of the school. Please consider this carefully when reviewing the content of your messages and of the Internet sites accessed using the school's equipment.

- **Guidelines for Business and Personal Use**

The school makes e-mail and Internet access available to employees, based on the needs of their position. They should be used *primarily* for school business and instructional purposes. However, *limited* personal use of these resources is authorized so long as such use is occasional, of reasonable duration, does not adversely affect employee or system performance, and does not violate state or federal laws or compromise intellectual property rights.

- **Prohibited Activities**

The following are examples of activities that are prohibited while using the school's networks, Internet, and e-mail, and which may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination. These activities include, but are not limited to:

- Accessing the files or communications of others without appropriate authorization
- Downloading of software or attachments (which have the potential to spread viruses and worms throughout the entire school network) without the prior approval of the Head of the IT Committee.
- Communications that are addressed to another user in any manner that could reasonably cause him or her distress, embarrassment, or unwarranted attention, as this may constitute harassment
- Personal attacks, including but not limited to attacks based on race, color, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, ancestry, age, disability, veteran status, or any other categories protected by law
- Browsing, retrieval, display, or distribution of vulgar, offensive, or inflammatory language, material, or images, including sexually explicit materials, language, or pictures
- Using school networks or resources to engage in any illegal activity
- Sending messages that adversely affect the reputation of the school or its students, parents, or community members

Privacy and Monitoring

The school retains the right to monitor network usage as well as usage of individual computers and e-mail accounts, and employees should not have an expectation of privacy when utilizing

school networks, systems, or electronic communication resources. This includes, but is not limited to, the monitoring/viewing/accessing of: Internet activities; e-mail activities and accounts; network activities and accounts; all data and/or software stored on desktop, laptops, and disk. The school retains possession of all email sent or received using school-provided, school-domain email accounts in perpetuity.

All employees explicitly agree to this condition in consideration for the ability to utilize the school's computer networks and resources, including email..

Cell Phones and Text Messaging

While the school does not provide cell phones for employees, nor does it monitor cell phone communications, employees must abide by all pertinent privacy, confidentiality, and discretion standards of the school when using cell phones, text messaging, or any other services or devices when communicating about school-related matters. In addition, employees are requested to refrain from the use of cell phones while teaching a class.

Data Security

E-mail should never be considered a totally secure or confidential medium. Any network administrator between here and its destination may view e-mail that is sent over the Internet. Personal information, like personal addresses, credit card numbers, etc., should not be transmitted through e-mail and non-secure Web sites. Notify the network administrator immediately if, by accident, you encounter materials that violate rules of appropriate use, or if you suspect any inadvertent lapses in data security.

Message Content

Employees should be careful not to write anything (even in a text message) that they wouldn't want repeated. E-mail can be forwarded to hundreds of people, in and out of our school—and text messages can be revealed in court. Once you have sent the message, it is out of your control. Be especially careful about material that would violate a student's, parent's, or other employee's privacy. Please be aware that even messages or documents that you consider "informal," "casual," or "personal" may need to be retained by the school and shared in any litigation matters, as required by federal regulations.

Viruses and Attachments

There are many dangerous viruses that circulate on the Internet and through unsafe computing practices. To avoid getting a virus spread through your e-mail, never open an e-mail attachment

unless you know what it is—even if it comes from someone you know and trust. Always make sure you are running an up-to-date virus scanner, both here and at home. Please see the the Head of the IT Committee with any questions regarding viruses, attachments, or related issues.

Intellectual Property Rights

All employees are required to abide by applicable copyright laws and their coverage of text, program code, music, or video; you must use only legal software, shareware, or freeware on the school computer systems.

Policy Violations

Access to the computers/laptops owned by the school is a privilege, not a right. This privilege may be restricted and/or revoked at any time for use not consistent with the educational goals of the school. (This includes employees remotely logging onto the school network or using their school e-mail account from home or when traveling.)

Consequences for violations of this policy, include but are not limited to:

- Loss of network access privileges, including Internet and/or e-mail access
- Loss of computer access privileges
- Disciplinary action by administration including, but not limited to, immediate termination from employment
- Legal action and prosecution by the authorities, if appropriate

SECTION IV

CONFIDENTIALITY AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Confidentiality

School Records

As a private institution charged with the development and supervision of minors, it is of the utmost importance to Vermont Commons School that all employees maintain student confidentiality. This includes not removing student records without administrative approval, and not discussing individual students outside of the school setting. More subtly, employees need to be sensitive to the surroundings they find themselves in when speaking about students. An example includes discussing a student with parents while other people are within hearing distance. All employees must be constantly vigilant about the circumstance and situations under

which an individual student is discussed so as to preserve the rights and dignity of the student and his/her family.

Employees may also be privy to information of a confidential and sensitive nature involving the personnel and operations of the school. Under no circumstances is such information to be disclosed to any person either within or outside the Vermont Commons School organization without a strict business-related need-to-know and the express permission of the School Head.

General

All Vermont Commons School employees are exposed to confidential information related to students, parents, and co-workers. To protect the interests of all these individuals, all employees will keep such information confidential. Furthermore, in order to preserve the dignity of students, parents, and staff, employees will refrain from negative discussions related to these individuals, especially in informal settings where conversations may be overheard by others. Information about children, families, and employees should be used in a professional manner, only with those with a business-related need-to-know, and should never be used as a topic of casual conversation or gossip.

Intellectual Property and Copyright Ownership

During the course of employment with Vermont Commons School, an employee may produce material that can be patented, trademarked, copyrighted, or covered with similar legal protections. Due to the employment relationship between the school and the employee, both the school and the employee acknowledge that all such material that can be copyrighted (including but not limited to lesson materials, books, booklets, research papers, videos and DVDs, software programs, logos, diagrams, and all other artistic or intellectual works of this nature) that are produced on the school's behalf are owned by the school as a work-for-hire and thus may be submitted for patent, trademark, copyright, or similar protection by the school.

These work products are deemed to be school property and, as such, are among Vermont Commons School's trade secrets, not to be used for personal benefit or divulged to outside parties without the expressed, written consent of the School Head.

Violations

Violations of this policy may subject the employee to corrective action up to and including termination of employment, as well as possible legal action against the employee to protect the school's rights and interests.

PERSONNEL RECORDS AND CHANGE OF STATUS

Vermont Commons School maintains an employee file for each active or former employee, which contains an administrative record of your employment with the school. These records are confidential and are held in controlled file cabinets.

Personnel files are the property of the School, and access to the information they contain is restricted. Generally only administration personnel of the School who have a legitimate reason to review information in a personnel file are allowed to do so. Active employees may make a request to the Head of School to see their employee file which then may be viewed only with an administrator present. In no case may an employee alter or remove information from the file, nor may the file be removed from the immediate area in which it is being viewed.

Confidentiality of Employee Records

Personnel files are the property of Vermont Commons School and access to the information contained within is restricted. Generally, only members of the administration who have an appropriate business-related reason to review information in a file are allowed to do so.

Change of Status

It is important to keep the Business Office informed of any changes in your personal information. If you change your name, address, phone number, marital status, number of dependents, or other pertinent personal data, please notify the Business Manager immediately.

Termination of Employment

If you decide to resign your position, we request that you submit a written letter of resignation to your supervisor stating your reason(s) for leaving and indicating your last day of employment. All employees under contract with the school are expected to fulfill the terms of their contract, absent extraordinary extenuating circumstances. Please see the Business Manager with any questions regarding the terms and conditions of your contract.

- **Notice Period**

- A minimum of two weeks' prior notice is requested. It is expected that you will be present at the school and not request leave during this period, in order to assist in the orderly transition of duties.

- **Exit Interview**

- Upon termination, you are required to return to the school all school property and materials and abide by the terms of the confidentiality clause in this manual. Prior to your termination date, the Business Manager will be in contact with you to conduct an exit

interview, during which all matters regarding final paychecks, continuation of benefits options, and similar issues will be discussed.

Confidential Information

The misuse, unauthorized access to, or mishandling of confidential information—including but not limited to information or data pertaining to employees, students, parents, volunteers, vendors, community members, the school’s marketing plans, school operations or finances, and similar facts—is strictly prohibited. Violation of this policy is considered serious misconduct and will subject the employee to corrective action up to and including termination of employment.

Handling of Confidential Materials

Below are guidelines to clarify expectations and procedures concerning security of information and records. These standard practices will help ensure the safety and right to privacy of all members of our school community.

Definition of Confidential Information

Documentation and records including but not limited to all individual student, parent, and family information—including grade reports, faculty comments, test results, letters of recommendation, disciplinary reports, admissions applications and files, financial aid information, academic warning lists, library loan information, medical records, financial aid records, and annual fund and capital campaign donations are considered confidential materials. All personnel information—including compensation information, performance reviews, health information, insurance forms, tax forms, e-mail messages, and financial records—is also considered confidential information.

Storage

Confidential information, (defined above) is to be stored in locked file cabinets or other secure (locked) locations in the department or office responsible for maintaining and processing the specific data. In no case should such information be left out on desks temporarily or overnight or unsecured in an unattended classroom or office.

Student files are to remain in administrative offices and may not be taken to classrooms. Teachers and advisers are encouraged to review student files for helpful information, but this is to be done in administrative offices.

Computer passwords are to be known only by those employees who have regular need to access information as part of the responsibilities of their position. Computer diskettes, CDs, DVDs, or other electronic or physical media containing files are to be kept in secure (locked) storage when not in immediate use. Under no circumstances is any student to be given a password for a faculty or administrative computer account.

Computer Security

Employees who use computers (whether desktops or laptops) with Internet access are responsible for securing the computers. The Faculty's computers are not to be used by students without supervision. Teachers are encouraged to consult with the Director of Technology for ways to improve security of computer systems. Please see the Acceptable Use of Internet, E-mail, and Electronic Resources policy for further details.

Faculty mailboxes are used for communication of confidential information between and among faculty and administrators. Consequently, students are not allowed to remove mail from faculty mailboxes. If a student has a legitimate reason to put something in a faculty mailbox, this should be handled through the administrative assistant in that division.

Disposal of Records

Any confidential information is to be shredded before disposal, with administrative approval. Shredders are available on campus.

Transmission of Data

Memoranda containing confidential information must be marked “confidential” at the top. Letters, etc. that contain particularly sensitive information should be distributed in envelopes.

Special precautions should be taken with facsimile transmission (fax) of confidential information. If confidential information, such as student records, is faxed to another institution or person, an Vermont Commons School fax cover form and cover letter must be included that indicate the material is confidential and state to whom the material is addressed. Confidential materials should not be faxed unless someone at the other institution has agreed to receive them. Confidential materials should not be faxed unless there is a compelling reason.

Information about students is not to be given out to persons or organizations not affiliated with the school. No student information should be revealed over the telephone—even a confirmation of a student’s enrollment at the school—unless the caller has identified her/himself and the caller is known to have a right to the information. Callers identifying themselves as relatives or family friends should not be assumed to be legitimate or entitled to the student information. All such requests require approval of school administration before any information is released in any form or manner. **Please consult with the School Head regarding any questions concerning confidential data or materials.**

Names and addresses of students or employees, school handbooks, photographs, publications, yearbooks, or similar materials may not be distributed outside the school, unless a specific, legitimate use is approved in advance by the school administration.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

All employees of Vermont Commons School are expected to maintain the highest ethical standards in the conduct of school affairs—carrying out school business with integrity and complying with all applicable laws without consideration of personal advantage or gain.

Gifts, Favors, and Payments by the School

While we want to be true to our generous, giving culture and tradition at all times, it is vital that all employees consider the perception of others when giving gifts on the school's behalf. Gifts, favors, and payments may be given to others at school expense, if they meet all of the following criteria:

- They are consistent with accepted business practices.
- They are of sufficiently limited value and in a form that will not be construed as a bribe, kickback, or payoff of any kind.
- They are not in violation of applicable law and generally accepted ethical standards.
- Public disclosure of the facts will not embarrass the school.
- The gift is within the department or division's budget and is approved by the Division Head or Department Chair.

Gifts, Favors, and Entertainment Received by School Employees

School employees may not seek or accept for themselves or others any gifts, favors, or entertainment from any persons or business organizations that do or seek to do business with the school except for minor common courtesies usually associated with customary business practices.

For example, gifts of perishable items usually given during the holidays such as hams, cookies, nuts, etc., are acceptable. Any gift or offering beyond this level must be reported to the School Head, who will determine whether the gift may be appropriately accepted on an individual basis or for the benefit of the school. Please see Acceptance of Gifts from Students and Parents.

Conflicts of Interest

Employees are expected to take great pains to avoid any situation, which involves or may involve a conflict between their personal interest and the interest of the school. As in all other facets of their duties, employees dealing with suppliers, contractors, vendors, consultants, or any person doing or seeking to do business with the school are to act in the best interest of the school at all times.

All employees are expected to immediately report to their Supervisor or Department Chair or the Head of School any potential situation, which may involve a conflict of interest. Such conflicts include:

- ownership by the employee or by a member of his/her family of a significant interest in any outside enterprise which does or seeks to do business with or is a competitor of the school—including serving as a director, officer, partner, consultant, or in a managerial or technical capacity with such an outside enterprise.
- acting as a broker, finder, go-between, or otherwise for the benefit of a third party in transactions involving or potentially involving the school or its interests.
- any other arrangements or circumstances, including family or other personal relationships, which might prevent those involved from acting in the best interest of the school.

WHISTLE BLOWER POLICY

Vermont Commons School is committed to lawful and ethical behavior in all of its activities and is committed to maintaining a workplace where Employees are free to raise good faith concerns regarding the school's business practices. The School requires that its Employees conduct themselves in a manner that complies with all applicable laws and policies. Set forth below is the school's policy with respect to reporting good faith concerns about the legality or propriety of the School's actions.

Reporting Concerns

An Employee who has a good faith concern regarding the legality or propriety of any action contemplated to be taken or taken by the School, or another Employee, Board member, or volunteer, or a good faith belief that action needs to be taken for the School to be in compliance with laws, policies or ethical standards, must promptly file a written report with the School Head or the Chair of the Board of Trustees.

Investigation

The School will investigate these reports with care. The School's interest in being thorough in its investigation means that it cannot promise complete confidentiality, but it will act as discreetly as reasonably possible. If, as a result of the investigation, the School discovers a problem, it will promptly alert the Chair of the Board of Trustees and take corrective action as it deems necessary.

Retaliation

The School will not discharge, threaten, or discriminate against an Employee in any manner for his or her reporting in good faith what he or she perceives to be a wrong doing, violation of law or policy, or other unethical conduct. The School will impose disciplinary measures, up to and including termination, against anyone who threatens or retaliates against an Employee who makes such a good faith report.

SECTION V
PERFORMANCE EVALUATION AND
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Performance Evaluation

The purpose of evaluation at Vermont Commons School is to help teachers, staff, and administrators successfully grow in the practice of the talents they possess to best serve the needs of the school community and its members. The full evaluation system used at VCS is detailed in the Faculty/Staff Handbook.

General Overview

Mentoring employees and evaluating their work is a continuing process, overseen by the School Head, the Administrative Team, and the Department Chairs. Faculty members will be visited in their classrooms periodically for purposes of evaluation. Staff and administrators will be observed on an ongoing basis. A copy of any written evaluation will be provided to the individual and included in the employee's personnel file.

Frequency of Observation and Evaluation

With regard to frequency of observation and evaluation:

- All administrators will generally be evaluated on a rotating and ongoing basis

- Faculty evaluation cycle and frequency are in the faculty guide
- Staff evaluations will generally occur annually.

Corrective Action

Vermont Commons School encourages our employees to develop and perform to their fullest potential at all times. When an employee's performance or conduct does not meet established standards, we do not look to "punish" but rather to quickly, effectively, and eagerly support the employee in correcting the behavior or improving his/her performance. The school has developed the following general procedure for addressing most behavior or performance issues.

Please note: While the school intends to address most common performance issues in the manner described in this policy, employees should be aware that the school maintains all of its rights under the employment relationship. The school does not restrict itself from altering its approach to corrective action as circumstances warrant, in the School Head's sole discretion. There are two common exceptions to the corrective action process, of which employees should be aware.

Misconduct or other serious behavioral issues, especially circumstances involving risk to students or other employees, will ordinarily be addressed promptly and firmly outside of the process described in this policy.

In the case of employees who are new to the school, the school and the employee may quickly determine that there is a misalignment between the employee's skills and interests and the school's needs in the position. In these cases, plans to resolve this misalignment ordinarily may be handled promptly and separately from the process shown in this policy.

Corrective Action Process:

Step One: Verbal Warning

When a performance or conduct issue arises, a conversation will occur between the supervisor and the employee, and the employee will be given a reasonable amount of time to correct the deficiency.

Step Two: Written Warning

If the employee's performance does not meet standards within the agreed time limit of the verbal warning, the supervisor will provide a written warning to the employee, detailing the required performance improvements—which the employee will be required to sign in acknowledgment of receipt.

Step Three: Termination or Non-Renewal of Contract

If the employee's conduct and/or performance does not improve as required, the school may choose to terminate the individual's employment (in accordance with the employee's contract, if applicable), or not renew the employee's contract for the following school year.

COMPENSATION

Salary offers will emphasize the skills and responsibilities required in the performance of each job, as well as your experience in the specific area for which you are being employed at Vermont Commons School. Your compensation arrangement will be reviewed annually by the School Head. Your initiative, performance, and attendance will be evaluated by the School Head and represent the primary factors in determining whether you are eligible for a pay adjustment and, if so, how much it will be.

Staff and Administrator Compensation

Salaries for staff and administrative employees are determined based, in part, on local market rates and set by the School Head. Salaries are typically reviewed in February of each year, with new salaries communicated to staff and administrators and becoming effective as of July 1. Salary increases are dependent on successful performance and are not automatic or guaranteed from year to year.

SECTION VI

EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

Vermont Commons School is proud to provide a program of health, welfare, and retirement benefits available to eligible employees. Brief descriptions of each benefits program are provided below. However, please note that these descriptions are overviews only, and that the plans themselves (including eligibility requirements) are governed by the Summary Plan Descriptions (SPDs) and related plan documents, maintained in the Business Office. In the event of any conflict between the descriptions below and the plan documents, the plan documents will govern.

Employee Benefits Programs

Vermont Commons School is proud to offer a well-rounded program of benefits to support the health, wellness, and retirement needs of employees and their dependents. This program includes the following plans:

- Medical
- Dental
- Vision
- Life insurance and AD&D insurance
- Business Travel and Accident Insurance
- Short-Term Disability (STD)
- Long-Term Disability (LTD)
- Worker Compensation Insurance (WC)
- Simple IRA Retirement Plan

Government-Mandated Benefits

Social Security
Unemployment insurance
State Disability insurance

Continuation of Benefits (COBRA)

As a sponsor of employee benefits plans, Vermont Commons School is covered by the regulations of the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA), the federal law pertaining to continuing benefits coverage after employees are no longer eligible. Under the provisions of COBRA, employees and their dependents who enroll in the school's medical or dental plans may be eligible to continue coverage at their own expense—usually for up to 18 months, and in certain circumstances up to 29 or 36 months—upon terminating employment with the school or experiencing other qualifying events (e.g., such as a dependent student losing coverage due to reaching the age limit or graduating from college).

The decision to continue your health insurance is voluntary. The cost to continue coverage under COBRA is the full monthly premium for coverage. You and/or your eligible dependent must pay the required premium in a timely manner on a monthly basis. Failure to pay the premium will result in the coverage being cancelled, as permitted by law.

You will be notified of your COBRA rights upon enrolling in medical coverage, as well as at the time of your termination of employment or when a qualifying event occurs. It is vitally important that you inform the Business Office when a potential qualifying event occurs that may affect your coverage—such as getting married, divorced, or separated, or having or adopting a child, or when a child over the age of 18 is no longer a full-time student or reaches the maximum coverage age for the school's benefits plans.

Please see the Business Manager for further details.

Medical Information Privacy under HIPAA

The purpose of this policy is to inform employees regarding compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996. All employees should be aware that HIPAA severely restricts the sharing and transmission of private health information (PHI) to non-qualified parties.

Employees should never share private health information of themselves or others. In certain circumstances—such as with regard to colleagues who are ill or in the hospital—we realize this may seem contrary to the spirit and culture of caring for colleagues that we have established over the years at our school. While we always seek to maintain our caring culture, we all need to recognize the personal protections provided under HIPAA and remain in compliance, for the benefit of all concerned.

Please consult the Business Office with any questions regarding the school’s responsibilities and individual employee responsibilities with respect to HIPAA and private health information.

TIME OFF

Vacation and Eligibility

Paid vacation is available to all full-time administration and support staff (i.e., non-faculty) who have been employed at Vermont Commons School for at least six months.

Accrual, Payout, and Carryover Provisions

Eligible employees are entitled to paid vacation time on a fiscal year (July 1–June 30) basis, according to the chart below. Vacation days must be used within the fiscal year and may not be carried over into a subsequent year. Employees will not be paid for unused vacation days.

Vacation Usage

Vacation time may be used as full or half days. Vacation days **may not** be taken:

- in connection with holidays
- between August 15 and October 1
- between May 15 and graduation (very busy times during the school year)
- Exceptions may be made by the School Head for extraordinary circumstances.

Vacation time is in addition to the paid time off that is provided for all full-time employees during all school breaks (e.g., holiday break, spring break, etc.).

Vacation time **does not count** as time-worked for purposes of calculating overtime pay

An employee may be permitted to use some or all of his/her accrued vacation time when going on an approved leave of absence (such as a family medical leave). See the individual leave of absence policies for more details.

Vacation Accrual Rates for Staff and Administrators

Eligible full-time employees shall receive vacation time as follows.

Classification	Years of Service at VCS	Amount of Annual Vacation
Support Staff	0–4 years	2 weeks (10 work days)

	5–9 years	3 weeks (15 work days)
	10+ years	4 weeks (20 work days)
Administration *		4 weeks (20 work days)

*All administrators are given 4 weeks of vacation annually, which must be taken between June 15th and August 15th.

The administrative team should coordinate summer work schedules well ahead time.

Summer workdays begin at 9 a.m. and end at 3 p.m.

Vacation for Faculty Members

Full-time faculty members remain on full pay during school break periods (e.g., holiday break, spring break, summer break, etc.). Faculty members are **not eligible** to earn vacation time in addition to paid time off for breaks.

PERSONAL/SICK TIME

Eligibility and Purpose

Personal/sick time will be provided to all regular full and part-time employees so that they may attend to their own personal illness/issues or those of their dependent(s). This time is NOT cumulative from year to year. Personal time **must be requested and approved by the Head of School at least one week in advance**. If the request whether religious or not, falls on a "work day" then it is to be a personal/sick day. If approved, personal days must be immediately reported by the employee to the business office.

Vermont Commons School reserves the right to require proof of illness when employees are away from work due to illness for three days or longer. Generally, absences beyond three days may require proof of illness from a licensed physician or other qualified medical professional.

Accrual Rates

The school provides personal/sick time to eligible employees during each academic year at the following rates. In the event the # of day exceeds maximum amount given, salaries will be docked accordingly.

All full and part-time employees receive seven days of sick/personal time a year. Sick/Personal days MAY NOT be taken in conjunction with vacations. The majority of a day will count as one of the days taken. The sick/personal time allowance for the academic year is provided to the employee in lump sum on the first day of the academic year.

Sick time **does not count** as time-worked for purposes of calculating overtime.

An employee may be required or permitted to use some or all of his/her accrued sick time when going on an approved leave of absence (such as a family medical leave). See the individual leave of absence policies for more details.

Carryover and Payout Provisions

Personal/sick time may not be carried over year to year.

Payment will not be made for unused sick days.

Coordination with Disability Coverage

When an employee is out sick for more than five days, short or long term disability and/or Family Medical Leave (FMLA) may apply. Please refer to Employee Benefits and Leaves of Absence sections of this handbook for further details. Consult with the Business Office for any questions.

Call-in Procedures

The employee (or, if necessary, a family member or friend) should promptly notify his/her supervisor and the school receptionist of the need for sick time and should report the use of sick days to the Business Office as soon as possible but at the latest within one week of absence..

Holidays

Vermont Commons School provides for paid holidays for all full-time employees. The specific number and dates of holidays are determined annually by the School Head. A list of all holidays for that year is made available to all employees prior to the start of each school year. Holidays follow the school calendar.

LEAVES OF ABSENCE

Maternity/Paternity/Adoption Leave Policy

As a caring community, Vermont Commons School strives to support employees who are experiencing parenthood. To this end, the school has established this policy, to provide certain benefits to eligible employees in addition to those that may be available to them under Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and other state or school-based policies.

Eligibility

Full-time employees are eligible to enjoy the benefits of this policy after six months of service with Vermont Commons School. Both men and women are eligible for this policy.

Maternity/Paternity/Adoption Leave Benefits

The Vermont Parental and Family Leave Law designates that Parental Leave is given to an employee who is expecting a child or who is a new parent. At Vermont Commons School full time female employees who become birth or adoptive parents will receive six weeks of paid leave, beginning with the employee's last day of work prior to the birth or adoption. Full time male employees who become birth or adoptive parents will receive three weeks of paid leave, beginning at the discretion of the family.

Pay During Leave

With regard to pay, the first six (or three for male employees) weeks of the leave shall be paid. After that time, the employee, with approval of the Head of School, may choose to utilize some or all of his/her personal/sick time. After all paid time off is exhausted; the balance of the leave will be unpaid.

Military Leave

If you are a member of a military reserve unit or you enlist in military service for the United States, you will be granted leave without pay when you are required to be absent from work in order to fulfill your military commitments. You should submit a written request, which will be placed in your personnel file. Returning military leave personnel will be re-employed according to the guidelines of the federal Uniformed Services Employment and Re-Employment Rights Act (USERRA) and any other applicable state or federal law.

If you are a voluntary member of a military reserve unit, you should give written notice to your supervisor well in advance of your required attendance at a two-week summer reserve training camp.

JURY SERVICE

All employees are eligible for jury duty leave.

Special Situations

There are special situations and exceptions to this policy.

- An employee who becomes involved in a legal matter as a result of the performance of his/her duties at Vermont Commons School and must, therefore, appear in court or attend related proceedings will be considered to be on school business and jury leave will not apply.
- An employee required to appear in court as a plaintiff or defendant in any personal action not related to school business is expected to use personal days, vacation days, or personal leave without pay to cover the period of absence.
- An employee who agrees to testify as an expert witness in a court proceeding is expected to use personal days and/or vacation days to cover the period of absence, unless the matter pertains to school business and occurs at the school's request.

Procedure

Employees who are called to jury duty should inform their Department Head or Dean of Faculty to provide coverage for the days missed. A Request for Leave form must be completed for all days associated with jury duty and a copy of the jury notification must be attached and provided to the Business Office at the completion of the jury service.

BEREAVEMENT LEAVE

As a caring community, we strive to bring comfort to employees who suffer the loss of a loved one during their time of need. For this reason, the school provides up to three (3) days off with pay to full-time employees to attend to personal and family arrangements surrounding the death of a family member.

MEDICAL OR PERSONAL LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Purpose

The School complies with the Vermont Parental and Family Leave Law which designates that employers with 15 or more employees working an average of 30 hours/week offer eligible employees family leave to attend to their own serious illness or that of a family member.

Procedure

To apply for this leave, you must submit a written request to the School Head outlining the general reasons for the leave (please be careful to avoid sharing any detailed personal health or other protected information).

Approval

The School Head, in consultation with the school's attorney, will review your request in light of the circumstances and the impact that such a leave would have on the school and its students and decide on a case by case basis if leave will be granted.

Pay, Benefits, and Job Protection During Leave

Leave, if granted, will be unpaid—except for any sick, personal, or vacation time that may be appropriately applied. The school will continue its contribution to benefits programs that you are enrolled in during the leave, though you are required to make arrangements with the Business Office to provide your portion of premium contributions if you wish to maintain your benefits in force.

The duration of the leave will ordinarily be a maximum of three months, unless a longer period is required by applicable law. Employees should be aware that while the school will endeavor to cover your position on a temporary basis, your job is not guaranteed to be available to you at the conclusion of your leave (unless required by applicable law).

If you have questions about this policy, please consult with the Head of School.

Worker Compensation Leave and Injury Reporting

If an employee is injured on the job, the employee must report the injury to his/her supervisor immediately, for the benefit and protection of both the employee and the school and to maintain the rights and benefits available to the employee under the law.

If an employee needs to be absent from work due to a workplace injury and has filed a work-related injury report, the employee will be placed on Workers' Compensation Leave for the duration required by law. All benefits ordinarily provided by the school (including medical and dental), and for which the employee is otherwise eligible, will be continued during the period of disability.

SABBATICAL LEAVE POLICY

Purpose

A VCS sabbatical leave is defined as an approved leave of absence for the purpose of encouraging faculty members (including administrative faculty) to engage in scholarly research, or other activities that will increase their scholarly achievement or their capacity for service to the school.

Eligibility

Eligibility for a sabbatical leave is limited to full-time members of the faculty who are in good standing and who have completed ten years of service as members of the faculty at Vermont Commons School with at least five of those being full time. In general, at least three years must elapse between consecutive sabbaticals.

Eligible faculty must apply for sabbatical leave at least eight months before the leave is to commence. Actual awarding of the sabbaticals will be handled by a Sabbatical Committee comprised of the Head of School, a designated Trustee, and a Department Chair

At the conclusion of a sabbatical leave the faculty member will forward to the Committee a report on activities undertaken during the period of the leave. Upon return to VCS, faculty share informative presentations of their activities to fellow faculty during a professional development session.

Procedure for Granting Sabbatical Leave

Application for a sabbatical leave should be made in writing by the faculty member and submitted to the Committee no later than eight months preceding the academic year for which the leave is sought. Because of the impact of a leave on departmental planning, timely application is recommended.

The Committee will decide which of the eligible faculty will receive sabbatical(s) and should do so within one month of the application deadline. The Head of School, after such additional consultation with the respective Department Chairperson and Business Manager as may be desirable, will formally grant the sabbaticals.

Term and Compensation

In general, a one semester sabbatical leave is granted to the eligible faculty member with a compensation of one-half of the faculty member's current semester base salary. Leaves commence in August or January each year.

Benefits

During a sabbatical leave, the faculty member will be eligible for any and all benefits that were in place before the sabbatical.

Intellectual Property

All ideas, discoveries, inventions, changes, improvements and developments, whether or not patentable and whether or not reduced to practice, uniquely associated with the sabbatical generated in connection with this Sabbatical Leave Policy shall be owned exclusively by the faculty member, including the exclusive right to own and register any such intellectual property in the faculty member's name. This policy relates to intellectual property created during and in connection with the employee's approved sabbatical leave, and it shall not broaden or modify the Intellectual Property and Copyright Ownership Policy generally covering employees.

TUITION REMISSION POLICY

VCS will offer tuition remission in the amount of 50% of the current year tuition for each student who is enrolled in the school as a full time student and is an immediate family member of a full time employee. Employees are allowed to request financial aid for the remaining 50% of the tuition. Our standard financial aid policies apply. Financial aid computations are based on the net tuition amount after tuition remission has been applied. Children of employees must go through the standard admissions procedures when entering VCS and will receive priority of financial aid requests over returning students and new students. If the employee lives in a school choice town or funding town, tuition remission computations are based on the net tuition after the town contribution has been applied. Tuition remission will be budgeted and paid for out of a separate expense account. Tuition remission will not be taken out of the current year's financial aid budget.

This benefit is available to all of the immediate family members of the employee. For the purpose of VCS's Tuition Remission Policy, an immediate family member is defined as:

a) Sons and daughters

- A biological, adopted, step, or foster son or daughter of the employee;
- A person who is a legal ward or was a legal ward of the employee when that individual was a minor or required a legal guardian;
- A person for whom the employee stands in loco parentis or stood in loco parentis when that individual was a minor or required someone to stand in loco parentis; or
- A son or daughter (as described above) of an employee's spouse or domestic partner.

b) Brothers and sisters; and;

c) Any individual related by blood or affinity whose close association with the employee is the equivalent of a family relationship.

SECTION VII

BUSINESS OFFICE POLICIES

EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT

The school expects that you will seek prior approval for *all* spending in advance of purchasing. We will reimburse you for ordinary, necessary, and reasonable expenses incurred when conducting authorized school business. Good judgment, common sense, and discretion should be used each time you spend the school's money. Employees should use vendors designated by the school. Please discuss approval guidelines and other questions with your supervisor and/or the Business Manager. Please note that expense reimbursement guidelines are dictated as much by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) as by our own policies. Purchase Forms are available in the Business Office, from administrators, and from Department Chairs and must be used for all purchases. All efforts should be made to keep all business expenses reasonable.

Reimbursable Expenses

Vermont Commons School will reimburse the employee for all necessary and reasonable expenses incurred while transacting school-related business as outlined below. The Business Manager may delineate approval policies. Original receipts are required for any single expenditure where possible, but always for an item of \$25 or more.

Reimbursable business expenses include:

- air and rail transportation to and from your business destination (lowest reasonable cost is the right choice)
- rental car while at your destination
- tolls and parking
- taxis to and from air/rail terminal to and from your business destination
- mileage rate for the use of personal autos at the IRS rate, which is updated regularly (please contact the Business Office for the current rate)
- room costs and associated taxes for a single room rate
- three reasonably priced meals per day while in travel status
- actual expenses for business calls and fax transmissions; employees should use the least expensive method when placing business calls
- agreed-upon usage for employees who are authorized to use a school mobile phone
- seminar fees with appropriate prior approval
- dues for professional organizations with appropriate prior approval

Non-Reimbursable Expenses (Unless Otherwise Approved)

- Mileage, tolls, and parking for home and work commuting, including weekend commuting to work
- Fines for traffic violations or parking tickets to personal autos or school vehicles
- Expenses for gas, parking, tolls, etc. for rental cars when used for any other purpose than Vermont Commons School business

- Gas charges for filling the tank of a personal vehicle in the course of business travel
- Mileage rate when using a rental car
- Expenses relating to the personal portion of a combined business and personal trip
- Items purchased for personal use or enhancement such as luggage, clothing, haircuts, etc.
- Baby-sitting services when away from home on school business
- Individual charitable contributions
- Plants, works of art, wall fixtures, as additions to your office space
- Interest charges on personal credit cards used for business
- Room or flight upgrades
- Bar charges
- In-room movies
- Double occupancy rates if you travel with a companion other than another employee

Mileage Reimbursement

Vermont Commons School shall reimburse employees for the legitimate use of their personal vehicles for official school business at the current rate allowed by the IRS for the use of a vehicle for business purposes, plus relevant expenses such as tolls. Employees must submit a statement of expenses with receipts when appropriate in order to be reimbursed. Please see the Business Office for required forms and other details.

PURCHASE FORMS

For proper financial management and tracking purposes, the school prefers to use purchase forms rather than expense reimbursements wherever possible. A purchase form is a form filled out in advance of a significant, planned purchase. Prior approval by your Department Chair or Division Head is required. Before making a purchase, you must obtain a purchase form from the Business Office. Contact the Business Office for more details.

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL REFERENCES (EMPLOYEES)

Letters or Telephone References

All requests for recommendations or letters of reference for past or current employees **must** be brought to the attention of the School Head for approval. We strive to accommodate all current and past employees who have served the school in good faith throughout the years, however, this process is necessary for the legal protection of all parties, so that the school may ensure that all references provided are appropriate and consistent with its established records and actions. All formal letters of reference from the school (on VCS stationery or using VCS email, and in the official capacity of the author) will be reviewed and approved by the Head of School before issuance. All telephone references issued in the official capacity of the author (on school time) must also be approved by the Head of School.

Process

Letters of reference or recommendation written on school stationery or using school email are considered to be official school correspondence. Faculty, administrators, or staff who are asked to provide references for current or former colleagues may *draft* the reference. However, they must have it reviewed and receive formal approval from the School Head prior to mailing. Failure to do so is considered a serious violation of school policy and may subject the employee to corrective action.

Similarly, the School Head must be consulted before responding to any verbal requests for references.

Employment Verifications

From time to time, the school is asked to verify the employment of current or past employees, such as for mortgage, auto loan, and other similar purposes, where only factual rather than qualitative information is sought (i.e., name, position, dates employed, etc.). All such requests for employment verifications must be directed to the Business Manager who will respond promptly.

SECTION VIII

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Vermont Commons School is committed to providing a safe working environment for all employees and one that is free of physical hazards. You are an important participant in helping us achieve this objective.

All employees are expected to:

- exhibit safe work behaviors at all times (serving as a role models to students and fellow employees in doing so)
- exercise active concern in the course of their work to prevent injuries to themselves, colleagues, and students
- take immediate steps to the extent prudent to report and/or remedy any unsafe condition (while not placing themselves or others in harm's way in doing so)

All potentially hazardous or unsafe circumstances should be reported immediately to the School Head or Assistant Head of School. All workplace injuries should be reported immediately to the Business Office and HOS. (See Workers' Compensation Leave and Injury Reporting policy for further details).

Weapons

Employees are prohibited from bringing firearms, weapons, and other dangerous or hazardous devices or substances to the School.

Building Security

Security of our facilities is of utmost importance to the school, and constant vigilance is asked and expected of all employees. Specifically, this includes ensuring that the following parameters are observed at all times.

The doors must remain closed, but not necessarily locked, at all times. All employees are responsible for closing the doors if they have been left open.

During regular working hours, employees are able to enter and leave the building without a key.

Outside regular working hours (after 5:00 p.m. during the week and on throughout the weekends) all doors will be locked. To enter the building outside of regular work hours, employees will need to use their building key to unlock and relock any and all doors.

Procedures

VCS does not employ a security service so please be mindful of your responsibilities listed here:-

- **Lock the Door:** At night, if you are the last Vermont Commons School employee to leave, you must remember to lock all the exterior building doors and windows. Also, check to see that all the lights, computers, and monitors are turned off.
- **Visitors:** All parents and visitors must check in at the Main office upon entering the building. Please direct visitors and parents to the office for name badges. Please send them back to the office for a name badge if they do not have one.

- **Challenging Any Unknown Person:** If you notice anyone on school property who you are not familiar with, it is your responsibility to ensure that they are, indeed, supposed to be here. Better to be safe and challenge a prospective family or vendor than to ignore a potential threat. Our employees and families should respect the fact that we take security seriously. However, **do not place yourself (or anyone else) in harm's way.** If you encounter belligerence or sense any danger, **please contact an administrator immediately.**
- **After-Hours Access:** The school office closes at 5:00 p.m. on most days. If you need to have an area open for a longer period of time, please know that you are responsible for locking up the building.-
- **Securing Valuables:** Make sure that all personal articles are either locked away or kept out of sight during the school day.

Personal Property

Although the school strives to provide a safe and secure campus environment at all times, employees should be aware that any personal property you may have on campus is not covered under the school's insurance policy. Employees should ensure that all personal property is clearly marked with their name, in case there is ever a question of ownership. Please take appropriate precautions in securing your valuables, as the school cannot be responsible for reimbursing you for lost or stolen items.

Tobacco Use at School

Tobacco use of any kind is prohibited in all areas on the school's premises and on all school trips and at school events. Additionally, smoking is always prohibited in the sight or presence of students while you are on duty and discouraged if students are encountered while off duty.

Search of School and Personal Property

Vermont Commons School, at its expense, may provide lockers, desks, vehicles, computers, and other equipment and property for the convenience and use of our employees. Although this equipment is made available for your convenience, you should remember that all lockers, desks, vehicles, computers, and other equipment remains the sole property of Vermont Commons School. Moreover, the school reserves the right to open and inspect lockers, desks, vehicles, computers, and any other school equipment made available to you, as well as any contents, effects, or articles that are in such lockers, desks, vehicles, or other equipment. Inspection can occur at any time, with or without advance notice or consent, during, before, or after working hours by any person designated by the school.

Leaving Campus During the School Day

For safety and security reasons, all faculty and staff must sign out or alert the office when leaving campus. Please note that errands and special appointments should be kept at a minimum and done during your lunchtime wherever possible.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT

In times of crisis the Crisis Management Team will assemble immediately to handle the school's response. The Head of School, Dean of Faculty, Dean of Students, and Business Manager will comprise the core team and will institute the Crisis Management Plan. A copy of the Crisis Management Plan is located in every administrative Office and on the Faculty Drive of the school's computer system. In all cases communication with faculty parents and Board will be channeled through this group. All communications with the press, public, or online audience need to be limited to designated personnel only. The safety of our students and employees will be our primary objective at all times.

Fire and Safety Drills

The school conducts fire drills on a regular basis in accordance with state law. All employees are required to leave their building through the designated fire exit (posted on each floor) in an orderly manner upon the sounding of the fire alarm. Employees must remain at least 50 feet from any building, and beyond school driveways and access roads. Employees are prohibited from re-entering any school building until directed by a Division Head, fire marshal, or other senior administrative official supervising the evacuation.

Procedure To Be Followed by Classroom Teachers

- When the alarm sounds, the teacher must escort the class out of the building, according to the designated fire exit for that room. The fire exits are posted in each room.
- The teacher is to be sure that all classroom windows are closed and the classroom door is closed and unlocked.
- The teacher must ensure that the students exit the building in a quiet and orderly manner.
- When evacuating, the teacher must take with him/her an advisee list for attendance purposes outside the building once the class has reached the designated assembly location.
- Assemble in the North parking lot as per the evacuation map.
- Teachers must have students remain at the assembly location until the Head Fire Department Personnel has checked the building. Teachers and students may not re-enter

the building until instructed to do so by the Head Fire Department Personnel or an administrator.

- Non faculty and visitors should gather in the North parking lot and check in with the administration.

SEVERE WEATHER CLOSINGS AND OTHER EMERGENCIES

During inclement weather, the school will broadcast any changes in schedule through the Parent Alert System (direct contact by text and email broadcast) and through local weather broadcasts on radio and television. Employees should await the contact from the Head of School, and listen to local broadcasts on all major FM and AM radio stations, and television stations WPTZ Channel 5, WCAX Channel 3. Our information will be listed as “Vermont Commons School.” In general we will follow the decisions of CVU High School to delay opening or close school so employees can check their home website as well.

Reporting to Work During Inclement Weather

Our first concern is for the safety of our students, faculty, and all members of the school community. All employees must make their own decisions about safety according to the driving conditions in your town. The school asks you to use good judgment in determining your ability to report to work under such conditions. If you unable to report to work on a severe weather day and the school remains open, you may choose to use available paid time off (such as sick, vacation, or personal time) to maintain pay for the day. You must follow our regular absence call-in procedures.

SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE REPORTING

The Vermont Statute, Chapter 49, title 33 requires that all educational and child care employees who enter into employment sign a statement stating that the employee has knowledge of, and will comply with, the mandate that he/she report known or suspected instances of child abuse.

The Statute states:

If you work in one of the professions listed below, you are a mandated reporter. This means that once you suspect a child may have been abused or neglected, you are required by law to report your suspicions to the Family Services Division of DCF—within 24 hours.

School guidance counselor, librarian, principal, superintendent, teacher, or any other individual regularly employed by a school district, or contracted and paid by a school district to provide student services for five or more hours a week during the school year;

As a mandated reporter, *you alone* are legally responsible for making sure a report is made within 24 hours.

If you suspect that a child is being abused or neglected, call 1-800-649-5285 — 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. A social worker will ask you questions about the situation, record the information you provide, ask you to complete a written report, and in some cases, ask you to gather more information.

Try to have as much information on hand as possible, including:

- the names of the child’s parents/caretakers;
- the child’s name, date of birth, home
- address, school or child care facility; and
- the nature and extent of the injuries or
- allegations of abuse/neglect.

For the purposes of this policy “reasonable suspicion” means that it is objectively reasonable for a person to entertain a suspicion, based upon facts that could cause a reasonable person in a like position, drawing, when appropriate, on his/her training and experience, to suspect child abuse or neglect.

Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect

Since protection of children is our paramount concern, all employees who become aware of any suspicious circumstances with any student should immediately bring this information to the direct attention of the School Head. For the protection of the child, please do not hesitate to come forward. If there is a reasonable likelihood of abuse or neglect, the School Head will immediately phone a report to the Family Services Division (FSD) of the Vermont Agency of Human Services, Department for Children and Families. FSD will assess the information and take further action, if necessary.