



# GUIDE FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

*The purpose of this guide is to give students and families a general understanding of many of the key expectations, guidelines, procedures, and practices of school life at Vermont Commons. It is not meant to be complete or comprehensive, but rather to be a useful starting place; for further explanation or clarification--or for topics not addressed here--please get in touch with the appropriate first point of contact in a given area of the school. A listing for this purpose can be found on the last page of this guide. The Guide for Students and Families may be updated and/or revised as the need arises.*

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## 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.

## 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.

## ISSUES AND ANSWERS GUIDE:

*When you need help with anything not covered in this guide, or if you don't know where to start when an issue arises, please use this helpful flowchart that will direct you to the right person:*

### If you need help with ...

- a class
- multiple classes
- A course subject/Department
- Academic Affairs or Policy, planned absences
- High School Student Affairs, Advisors
- Middle School Student Affairs, Advisors
- Encounter Weeks
- Research and Service
- IT, Forms, Renweb, Communications
- Learning Support and Enrichment/Tutoring
- College Counseling, Student Counseling, Athletics
- Business Office, Billings, Financial Aid
- Development, The Commons Fund, Alumni
- Buses, daily attendance, Head of School appointments

### Your first contact should be:

- the Classroom Teacher
- your child's advisor
- the Department Chair
- Jasmine Walker
- Chance Cardamone-Knewstubb
- Heather Moore
- Ben Wang
- Mark Cline Lucey
- Steve Lausier
- Jenna Bisset
- Ari Shapiro-Miller
- Linda Bursell
- Mary Hamilton
- Katherine Bailey

# I. ACADEMIC LIFE, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES

## GRADING

The school operates on a quarter and semester system. Semester course grades are calculated using weighted averages of quarters (45%) and exams (10%) where appropriate, and year-long grades are calculated using weighted averages of semesters (45%) and exams or culminating projects (10%).

### Grading Scale

Vermont Commons School grades on a 100-point, numeric scale for most courses. A student's GPA is an average of grades in all courses besides PE, health, and Encounter Week. Courses are offered on either a semester or yearlong basis.

| GRADE | PERCENTAGE    |
|-------|---------------|
| A+    | 97%-100%      |
| A     | 93%-96%       |
| A-    | 90%-92%       |
| B+    | 87%-89%       |
| B     | 83%-86%       |
| B-    | 80%-82%       |
| C+    | 77%-79%       |
| C     | 73%-76%       |
| C-    | 70%-72%       |
| D+    | 67%-69%       |
| D     | 63%-66%       |
| D-    | 60%-62%       |
| F     | 59% and below |

- **WP, WF, WM** - A designation is recorded for all courses in cases where a student withdraws from the class or from Vermont Commons School prior to the end of a quarter. WP: Withdrawn Passing means that a student's class average for the quarter at the time of the withdrawal is 60 percent or above. WF: Withdrawn Failing means that a student's class average for the quarter at the time of the withdrawal is below 60 percent. WM: Withdrawn Medical means that a student has withdrawn from the class for medical reasons. These grades are not calculated into a student's GPA, and they are not awarded credit.

- **I** – If extenuating circumstances arise during a quarter, and a student is unable to finish the required coursework on time, a grade of Incomplete ("I") may be given by the classroom teacher in conjunction with administration. In these instances, the student will have two weeks from the end of the quarter to make up the missing work. After the missing work is handed in, the teacher will calculate a grade and write a comment for the quarter. A new version of the Report Card will then be sent to the family.

● **P/F** – Some classes are designated as Pass/Fail courses. Classes designated Pass/Fail will not affect Honor-roll eligibility, and will not be used in the GPA. Physical education and health courses are graded on a Pass/Fail system based on a student’s preparedness, attendance, and participation.

**Encounter Week Grades** - Students receive scores of 1-5 for Encounter Weeks, which appear on their transcripts but are not included in the GPA. The scores are based on the grading rubric below:

5 – Exceeded expectations in all areas. Consistently helpful without being asked, engaged enthusiastically in all activities, always interacted in a positive manner with group members, demonstrated leadership commensurate with age.

4 – Exceeded some or all expectations. Student was not significantly deficient in any area.

3 – Consistently met expectations, or, exceeded expectations in some areas but was deficient in others.

2 – Consistently fell short of most or all expectations.

1 – Fell significantly short of expectations, and/or exhibited behavior that caused serious detriment to group functioning or safety, and/or consistently failed to engage in group activities.

## **Narrative Comments and Interim Progress Reports**

Vermont Commons School has established a system of assessment intended to measure student progress through the mastery and application of skills and content. To provide a complete picture of progress, students receive both a traditional percentage grade at the end of each quarter and a narrative comment at the end of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd quarters for each of their academic classes, as well as Research & Service and Encounter Weeks. Teachers describe the quarter’s class content, identify the individual student’s strengths and growth areas, and add any appropriate notes. Interim Progress Reports of numerical averages are sent out by the Registrar halfway through each quarter.

## **End of the Quarter**

All assignments, projects, and tests must be received by teachers prior to 5:00 p.m. on the last day of a quarter. Extensions beyond that date may be given by the teacher in conjunction with the administration and only in cases where illness or extraordinary circumstances precludes completion of the work. A grade of “I” is given until work is completed, which must occur within two weeks from the last day of the quarter.

## **Final Exams and Culminating Projects**

Final Exams and are administered and/or Culminating Projects are completed in the following subjects during a five-day exam period at the end of the second semester: English, Mathematics, History/Social Studies, Science, and World Languages. Exams run for 2 hours for 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders and 1½ hours for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. 6<sup>th</sup> graders do not take final exams. While there is no exam period at the end of the first semester, teachers may elect to give semester exams or assign deadlines for culminating projects

due at that point during the course of a slightly modified class meeting schedule in the last week of the first semester.

## Calculation of Second Semester Senior Grades

***For a senior participating in a Senior Project (see below for Senior Project details):***

The Third Quarter and abbreviated Fourth Quarter (approximately a combined 12-week period) count as the entire Second Semester grade for seniors who are approved to participate in Senior Project. The two quarters are proportionately weighted to determine a Semester grade. Seniors participating in Senior Projects take final exams and complete culminating assessments the week before beginning the Projects.

The grading breakdown follows the standard Vermont Commons School semester grading formula:

|             |                          |
|-------------|--------------------------|
| Quarter 3:  | 45 % of Semester 2 grade |
| Quarter 4:  | 45 % of Semester 2 grade |
| Final Exam: | 10 % of Semester 2 grade |

## Honor Roll and High Honors

Honor Rolls are determined at the close of each Quarter. Any student who achieves a quarterly GPA of at least 87% is placed on the Honor Roll. High Honors are awarded to students with a GPA of 93% or higher. E-Week, health, and PE grades are not calculated into the GPA and therefore are not considered part of Honor Roll designations.

## Academic Warning

Vermont Commons School encourages parents/guardians to monitor academic progress through the online grade book, via RenWeb on ParentsWeb. The Watch & Support team identifies students in academic difficulty and communicates with advisors, faculty, parents/guardians, and the Athletic Director when appropriate.

Academic difficulty is indicated when a student's class grade falls below a 70% in one or more classes and remains there for more than two weeks. At this point, the Watch & Support team and the advisor notify parents/guardians that their child is placed on Academic Warning.

## Academic Probation

Students who receive two or more grades below a 70% or one or more grades below a 60% at the end of a quarter or semester are placed on Academic Probation.

- Probation tenets will be devised by the advisor, teachers, Watch & Support team, and appropriate administrators. Improvement in grades and satisfaction of the probation tenets should occur with a reasonable timeframe.
- Possible tenets may include after school study hall, keeping and signing of a homework check in sheet, attending meetings with a specific teacher, requiring notebook checks, referral to a

learning specialist and/or tutor for support, withholding of a student's contract for the following year, among other measures. Probation tenets will be re-evaluated at the end of each quarter and Probation tenets may be altered upon re-evaluation.

- Students on Probation remain there for at least two quarters. At the end of each quarter, the faculty will meet to review the student's progress during the probationary period and then decide whether to remove the student from Probation, continue the Probation with revised tenets, or to take further action.

### **Academic Eligibility for Extracurricular Activities**

All current quarter grades are reviewed weekly the Watch and Support Committee. Students who are found to have less than a 70% in two or more classes, or less than a 60% in one or more classes will be declared ineligible for all Vermont Commons sports team activities, practices, and games. The ineligibility will last a week, or until the subsequent weekly review indicates the grades have risen above these levels.

To be eligible to participate in the annual drama production, students must conclude the First Quarter with all final Quarter grades above 60, and no more than one final Quarter grade below 70. Additionally, if a student's current grades are sufficiently low at the start of the casting process, the director of the drama program in consultation with Watch and Support may determine a student to be ineligible for participation.

## **REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATION**

Vermont Commons School presents a challenging college preparatory curriculum for grades 6-12. The faculty presents material in ever-increasing depth and complexity throughout a student's career. By a student's junior and senior year, students experience the expectations of college level courses while still having a strong mentoring relationship with their faculty as they transition to higher education.

Each academic year, students are expected to enroll in--and successfully complete--a full year of courses in each discipline, including Science, Mathematics, English, World Language, Social Studies, and a semester each of Research & Service and Art. The Department Chairs reserve the right to adjust a requirement after a process of application and review.

In the high school years, the student successfully completes the following Vermont Commons School courses of instruction during the academic year:

- 4 years of English
- 4 years of Sciences
- 4 years of Mathematics
- 4 years of World Language
- 4 years of History and the Social Sciences
- 4 semesters of the Arts

- 3 semesters of Research and Service
- 1 semester Senior Internship
- 4 years of Physical Education
- 11 Encounter Weeks

**Additional Requirements:**

In order to receive a Vermont Commons School diploma, students must meet the following additional requirements:

- Participate in Health and Wellness classes
- Successfully complete the requirements of the senior project program, if the student chooses to participate.

**Additional Information:**

- Students who enter Vermont Commons in 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade may be eligible for an individualized graduation plan as determined by the Department Chairs' Committee.
- Students receiving less than 60% as a final grade in a class are typically required to repeat that level, either via a summer program or during the following academic year, depending on the subject matter.
- Students with diagnosed learning differences may be waived from some requirements. Waivers require permission from the student's advisor, the Department Chair, the Watch & Support Committee, and the Assistant Head of School. Students who receive a waiver will be expected to elect another academic course or study hall, as appropriate.

**Health & Wellness class requirement**

All high school students must take health class and must, in order to meet the requirement, demonstrate the stated minimum competency for all of the learning objectives of the class. Currently, each high school grade has one day-long health retreat per semester. Grades 6-8 have their own Health and Wellness Curricula that constitute a number of classes at the beginning of each quarter, as well as two retreats.

**Physical Education class requirement**

Physical Education classes meet twice a week (Monday and Friday) from 2:35 to 3:30. Students are permitted one unexcused absence or unprepared day per quarter; thereafter they will receive a failing grade. Students may request a PE waiver from the PE Coordinator for participation in teams or activities outside of Vermont Commons. Such activities must be overseen by a coach or qualified instructor and have scheduled meeting times; the waiver is only in effect for the duration of student's participation in the outside activity. The student should arrange to be picked up at 2:35 on Mondays and Fridays.

## **RESEARCH AND SERVICE PROGRAM**



The mission of the Research & Service Program is to go beyond the traditional disciplines and classroom walls and to connect learning to community engagement and environmental stewardship. The Research & Service Program is a concrete manifestation of Vermont Commons School's deep commitment to place-based education, service learning, and ecological stewardship and provides a multi-aged setting that encourages leadership and fosters group skills. Students are evaluated on their active participation, preparedness, attitude, mastery of project-specific content, and leadership. In order to do the research and follow it up with a meaningful service project, Research & Service courses run the duration of a semester and are offered during the fall (8<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> grades) and spring (7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> grades); the 6<sup>th</sup> grade has its own separate Research and Service class, which serves as an introduction and grounding to the program. Research & Service grades are included in the GPA. Failure to complete Research and Service will obligate the student to complete 20 hours of community service with a non-profit organization.

## **SENIOR INTERNSHIPS**

As a capstone to the community-based education of our Research & Service Program, seniors engage during their fall semester in internships with local businesses, organizations, and professionals working in a broad array of field, allowing each of our students to pursue one of his or her passions in a deep, meaningful, and challenging way over a long period of time. The Internships are intended also to enable the student to do work that both contributes to society and allows each student to develop personally and uniquely. After a three-week course orienting seniors to the expectations and habits of the professional world (including skills such as interviewing, resume writing, and job etiquette), students intern for three school-hours per week throughout the first semester. The Program Coordinator both assists students in establishing these internships prior to the start of the school year and visits and oversees the ongoing internships over the course of the semester to assure their quality, as well as the accountability of the student. Juniors participate in a workshop in April, during which they examine their interests and life goals and scrutinize how these might lead to the internships they will pursue.

## **ENCOUNTER WEEK PROGRAM**

Each student participates in three Encounter Weeks per year, one in late September, one in late January, and one in late May. Encounter Weeks allow students to learn new skills in a variety of settings, from the summit of Mount Mansfield to the streets of Rome to Mayan villages in Belize. During these weeks, students explore the wilderness, the arts, and community-based projects. Encounter Weeks give students and faculty alike a new platform for connection and understanding. After the 6<sup>th</sup> grade year, the school strives to ensure that each student participates in at least one wilderness-based, overnight Encounter Week each year. We believe that being in the backcountry brings to life our environmental mission as a school. The challenges and accomplishments of spending time in the woods also provide a great opportunity to test oneself and to create stronger bonds between members of the Vermont Commons School community.

Students are expected to engage in their Encounter Weeks as fully as they would with any other aspect of school. To that end, teachers write evaluative comments for each student after each Encounter Week. All students are evaluated by their Encounter Week leaders based on participation, initiative, group cooperation, decorum on and off campus, and responsibility.

Students will be considered to have successfully completed three Encounter Weeks if the sum of their Encounter week grades for the year is no less than 8.5, and they receive a score of no less than two for any individual Encounter Week. Students must be present for a minimum of three full days of the Encounter Week in order to receive a grade. For each missed day of Encounter Week, a student's score will be reduced by one point. Missed days of Encounter Week or missed Encounter Weeks may be made up through the student's development of a field-based immersion experience to be carried out independently (although under the overall supervision of the Assistant Head of School) for the same duration of time missed during the Encounter Week. Successful completion of this independent Encounter project will receive proportional points towards the year-end minimum of 8.5.

The cost of Encounter Weeks is included in the price tuition, with the exception of typically up to three Big Trip Encounter Weeks each year. These special trips, which occur at the same time as other Encounter Week trips, typically involve air travel and cost participating students an additional fee (usually between \$500 and \$3000). Participation in Big Trips is voluntary, an application is involved, and groups often fund-raise throughout the year to offset the added cost.

## **EVENINGS OF STUDENT READINGS**

Twice during the academic year, the school hosts an Evening of Student Readings. As a community, we value students' scholarship and look forward to hearing their stories, essays, and poetry. All students are expected to share a piece of writing that has been thoughtfully revised and edited in their English classes. Friends and family are encouraged to attend.

## **CONTRACT HONORS**

Contract Honors is an opportunity for teachers to offer extra challenge for any given class in grades 10-12. Students make a "contract" for additional studies and earn an Honors designation for that course on their transcript. The guidelines governing student eligibility, participation requirements, and procedures for Contract Honors are as follows:

- The Honors Option- The option to participate in Contract Honors is made available by participating teachers, but may not be available in all classes. Contract honors can be offered only by the individual class teacher, and are be uniformly offered, or not, in classes with multiple sections by each teacher. The expectations in these sections is uniform as well.
- Timing of the Offer – All Contract Honors are offered simultaneously and at the end of the first quarter to students who pass requirements as described by the teacher at the outset of the course. Semester courses offer it 25% of the way through the course.
- Process of Selecting Students - Students need to meet certain standards, determined by the individual departments, to participate. These may include cumulative grade cut-offs, grade

averages, portfolios, etc. Honors are granted to those students who meet the certain and specific criteria determined by those departments.

- The Contract - A written contract clearly stating the expectations of the teacher with regard to work time, grading, meeting times, etc. is offered. It is to be signed by the teacher, student, advisor, and parents. Contracts include a designation of at least one hour of honors work per week, the goal being to explore subjects more broadly and deeply. Optional meeting times may be designated by the teacher.
- Grading - All students who contract for honors receive an "Honors" indicator next to the course name on their transcripts. Once a student is accepted into Contract Honors they cannot return to regular status. Honors grades are not weighted or accelerated when computing a student's GPA. All honors work is graded and included in calculating course grades. A description of the Contract Honors system is included on the Profile Sheet submitted to colleges.
- In order to take more than two Contract Honors courses, students must gain approval from the Department Chairs Committee.

## SENIOR PROJECTS

At the end of the spring semester each senior is provided the opportunity to design and implement a five week-long Senior Project. In lieu of regular classes, seniors pursue a career or skill interest and gain a sense of the professional setting surrounding this interest outside of the classroom in an ongoing, intensive experience reminiscent of their internships but uninterrupted. The goal is to provide seniors with time to both reflect on their experiences at Vermont Commons School and to pursue an intensive deep dive into a topic of their choosing. The Senior Projects mark a transition point for the seniors: the program allows them creatively to tie together their personal interests and academic experiences as they make the transition from high school to future pursuits.

**Eligibility:** Students whose projects are approved in early April by the faculty will be considered "pre-approved," pending a passing grade in all semester and yearlong classes. If a student is failing a semester-long, or yearlong class by the announced April deadline, he/she will not be eligible for a senior project. This student will receive a 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter grade, based on his/her average on the last day of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter and will spend the remainder of 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter in regular classes with the goal of raising his/her final grade to a minimum of 60% in order to graduate.

The following are the key components of the Senior Project program:

- **Project Advisor:** Students will request a Vermont Commons School faculty member to act as an advisor during the five-week period. Students will meet with their faculty advisor once per week throughout the course of the Senior Project. During the second week of May, the advisor will review the student's Daily Log and overall progress and provide an update for the entire faculty.
- **Community Mentor:** Students should work alongside a community mentor for thirty hours per week. This individual will sign a Letter of Agreement signifying her/his willingness and ability to supervise and participate in the program. The student will arrange a face-to-face meeting between his/her mentor and advisor before the final proposal is due.

● **Senior Project Proposal:** Students must define their project and what they hope to achieve academically, personally, and/or artistically in a written format. Students must also include a description of their exit projects and include Letters of Agreement from the community mentor and the project advisor in this proposal. Finally, students should include a timetable outlining how their time will be spent for the duration of the project. Students will review and revise their proposals with the guidance of their faculty advisor before turning in a final draft. *Students will present a revised proposal to a Senior Project Faculty Committee meeting in order to receive final approval and feedback.* If a student's proposal does not gain Committee approval by the stated deadline, the student may not participate in the Program and will finish his/her regular course of study, including final exams.

● **Daily Log/Journal:** Students are required to keep a daily journal to record and reflect on his/her experiences during the Senior Project. This journal will account for the student's time during the Senior Project. *Students must turn in their Daily Log and other documentation of their work one week before the Exit Projects.*

● **Exit Project:** Students must design a way in which to share their projects with the community. Presentations take a variety of forms, but should reflect on the experience as well as the research and analysis performed during the project. Exit Projects are followed by formal feedback from the faculty.

● **Research Paper:** Students are required to produce a 10-page research paper on a related topic.

● **Reimbursement:** Students may not receive pay for work associated with the Senior Project.

● **Grades:** Projects are pass/fail, and are determined by the entire faculty. Community Mentors will complete an evaluation of the student, to be turned in one week before the exit project, which will assist the faculty in determining the grade. In the case of a failing grade, the student will not receive a diploma until the Senior Project requirements are sufficiently met. Senior Projects that are deemed by the faculty to exceed the program's expectations in all aspects, from project proposal through Exit Project, may be given a "passing with honors" designation.

## DIPLOMA CERTIFICATES OF CONCENTRATION

### Visual Arts Certificate of Concentration

#### Overview

The Visual Arts Certificate is awarded to a student who exhibits a command of the visual or performing arts by studying the processes in the Vermont Commons School Arts Curriculum.

#### Goals

This certificate recognizes a student who articulates and demonstrates a strong understanding of the visual vocabulary in the arts. This student is a committed artist who consistently invests in the creative process in and outside of the art studio.

**Certificate Requirements: Vermont Commons School Art GPA of 87% or higher.**

Students must maintain a GPA within the Art Program of 87% or higher. In addition, only students who have completed at least three high school studio arts courses will be eligible for the certificate program.

### **Independent Art Project**

Each certificate student must design an independent art project in a chosen medium to be developed with the instructor.

### **Art Exposition**

Upon the completion of the Independent Project, each student must publicly display or present the project, highlighting the completed work.

### **Transcripts**

This program is based upon and closely follows traditional MFA culminating project models. The rigorous independent project of the Visual Arts Certificate can and typically does begin a year or two before senior year; however, the formal planning for the culminating Art Project and Exposition is recorded on the transcript only during the fall and spring of senior year as coursework-in-progress, specifically denoted "Art: Visual Arts Certificate Studio Hours." This designation is the equivalent of dissertation research hours used by Ph.D.-granting institutions and operates in precisely the same manner, in that it is non-graded coursework, the final evaluation of which is the successful or unsuccessful awarding of the special diploma certificate (a determination made by the diploma certificate-granting committee, consisting of the members of the Arts Department, the Assistant Head of School, and the Head of School, upon a live defense of the project to the committee). In the truly exceptional circumstance that a student completes the certificate prior to the start of senior year, its successful completion may be listed on the student's transcript and sent out to colleges and universities as such (however, the announcement and public awarding of the certificate only occurs upon and at the student's graduation ceremony at the same time the student's diploma is awarded). As one of the highest honors a student can achieve, the awarding of an Advanced Certification Program is announced during the conferring of the Vermont Commons School diploma at graduation.

So that colleges and universities to which the senior is applying understand the exceptional rigor and advanced academic nature of this program--and those rare individuals at Vermont Commons School who pursue it--a copy of this program policy from the *Vermont Commons School Guide for Students and Families* is to be included with all applications for admission to colleges and universities made by the student in the fall and/or winter of his or her senior year.

### **Applications:**

1. Check with academic advisor to be sure that you have met the academic requirements.
2. Inform the Chair of the Art Department (in writing) that you are interested in pursuing the Visual or Performing Arts Certificate of Concentration.
3. Develop your Independent Project

- If you are going to use your Senior Project, meet with the arts faculty to be sure that your project is appropriate, and to ensure that your Vermont Commons School project advisor and community sponsor are aware of this program.
  - If you are not going to use your Senior Project, identify a Vermont Commons School arts faculty member who will serve as your advisor and develop a project proposal. This written application will include: deadlines, a faculty/community advisor, and a description of the end product.
4. Publish a date for your exposition of work in your chosen medium.

## Naturalist Certificate of Concentration

### Overview

The Naturalist Certificate of Concentration recognizes students who have met the goals of the Vermont Commons School Science Mission Statement of producing *Naturalists*, students who study above and beyond the traditional science curriculum and are awarded a certificate upon graduation.

### Goals

This program provides recognition and an incentive to Vermont Commons School students who are committed to the environment and take their interest in Ecology out of the classroom and laboratory and into the natural world culminating in the *Naturalist Project*. Student will positively affect our local ecosystem.

### Certificate Requirements:

- Vermont Commons School Science GPA of 87%

Naturalists must demonstrate a mastery of the fundamental science concepts that will enable them to effect positive change in their environment. As part of this curriculum, students will successfully complete the equivalent of high school biology, chemistry, and physics.

- **Naturalist Project**

Students will design, carry out, and communicate the results of, an independent project which demonstrates their ability to effect real change in their environment. This project could take the form of the Vermont Commons School 'Senior Project'. If this Project is not the Vermont Commons School Senior Project, it must meet similar requirements and standards. In late spring of the senior year, the presentation of the Naturalist Project is made to the Science Department, the Academic Affairs and Policy administrator, and the Head of School; it is also open to the broader Vermont Commons School community.

- **Naturalist Tour**

During the spring semester, the student will design, and lead, a tour of the local watershed for the Vermont Commons School community, including the Science Department, Academic Affairs and Policy, and the Head of School. Naturalists will demonstrate their knowledge, with special attention to geology, flora/fauna, and the history of humans in the Champlain Valley. *In the case of a student who*

*has pursued lab-based work or a scientific project outside the realm of traditional naturalist study, the tour will be of the location or facility appropriate to his or her work and/or research.*

### **Transcripts**

This program is based upon and closely follows traditional doctoral dissertation research models. The rigorous independent project of the Naturalist Certificate can and typically does begin a year or two before senior year; however, the formal planning for the culminating Naturalist Project and Naturalist Tour is recorded on the transcript only during the fall and spring of senior year as coursework-in-progress, specifically denoted "SCI: Naturalist Certificate Research." This designation is the equivalent of dissertation research hours used by Ph.D.-granting institutions and operates in precisely the same manner, in that it is non-graded coursework, the final evaluation of which is the successful or unsuccessful awarding of the special diploma certificate (a determination made by the diploma certificate-granting committee, consisting of the members of the Science Department, the Assistant Head of School, and the Head of School, upon a live defense of the project to the committee). In the truly exceptional circumstance that a student completes the certificate prior to the start of senior year, its successful completion may be listed on the student's transcript and sent out to colleges and universities as such (however, the announcement and public awarding of the certificate only occurs upon and at the student's graduation ceremony at the same time the student's diploma is awarded). As one of the highest honors a student can achieve, the awarding of an Advanced Certification Program is announced during the conferring of the Vermont Commons School diploma at graduation.

So that colleges and universities to which the senior is applying understand the exceptional rigor and advanced academic nature of this program--and those rare individuals at Vermont Commons School who pursue it--a copy of this program policy from the *Vermont Commons School Guide for Students and Families* is to be included with all applications for admission to colleges and universities made by the student in the fall and/or winter of his or her senior year.

### **Applications**

1. Check with academic advisor to be sure that you have met the academic requirements.
2. Inform the Chair of the Science Department (in writing) that you are interested in pursuing the Naturalist Certificate.
3. Develop your Independent Project.
4. If you are going to use your Senior Project, meet with the science faculty to be sure that your project is appropriate, and to ensure that your Vermont Commons School project advisor and community sponsor are aware of this program.
5. If you are not going to use your Senior Project, identify a Vermont Commons School Science faculty member who will serve as your advisor and develop a project proposal. This written application will include; deadlines, a faculty/community advisor, and a description of the end product.
6. Publish a date for your Naturalist Tour.

## Global Citizen Certificate of Concentration

The Global Citizen Certificate of Concentration challenges and supports students to more deeply develop their capacity as engaged citizens of the world. We believe education in this century must place, at its core, global literacy and competency. Vermont Commons School seeks to develop global understanding and empathy, nurture an appreciation for the diversity of cultures, and challenge students to take action to address global needs.

### General Requirements

1. The INDEPENDENT PROJECT
  - a. See Global Citizen Certificate Independent Project Guidelines below
2. The PRESENTATION
  - a. To the school community and/or greater community
  - b. Teach about the global issue
  - c. Share experience & learning

### Plus a choice of 2 of the following:

3. MODEL UN participation
  - a. Minimum 10 MUN points (1 pt for local 1-day MUNs; 2 points for full-weekend MUNs; additional points awarded for organizational work)
  - b. Write a 400-600 word report, reflecting on how your Model UN experiences have shaped your understanding and growth as a global citizen.
4. CULTURAL IMMERSION
  - a. Student will make arrangements for 60-80 hours of immersion in a culture different from their own. This could take any form, from local service work to an international immersion program.
  - b. Write a 400-600 word report, reflecting on how your cultural immersion experience has shaped your understanding and growth as a global citizen.
5. WORLD LANGUAGE study
  - a. Two languages in addition to English. At least one must be a World Language taught at VCS.
    - i. Must complete four years VCS WL class with a final grade of 90 or above each year.
  - b. Student needs to make arrangements for 60-80 hours of instruction in the second World Language. Students will demonstrate proficiency in reading, writing, listening and speaking, including a final presentation about a topic using the target language.

### Academic Qualification

Minimum high school GPA in SS and WL (average of the two): 87%

Students are strongly encouraged to begin working toward the GCC before their Senior year.

### Transcript

This program is based upon and closely follows traditional doctoral dissertation research models. The rigorous independent project of the Global Citizen Certificate can and typically does begin a year or two before senior year; however, the formal planning for the culminating Global Citizen Project and Presentation is recorded on the transcript only during the fall and spring of senior year as coursework-in-progress, specifically denoted "SS/WL: Global Citizen Certificate Research." This designation is the equivalent of dissertation research hours used by Ph.D.-granting institutions and operates in precisely the same manner, in that it is non-graded coursework, the final evaluation of



which is the successful or unsuccessful awarding of the special diploma certificate (a determination made by the diploma certificate-granting committee, consisting of the members of the Social Studies and World Language Departments, the Assistant Head of School, and the Head of School, upon a live defense of the project to the committee). In the truly exceptional circumstance that a student completes the certificate prior to the start of senior year, its successful completion may be listed on the student's transcript and sent out to colleges and universities as such (however, the announcement and public awarding of the certificate only occurs upon and at the student's graduation ceremony at the same time the student's diploma is awarded). As one of the highest honors a student can achieve, the awarding of an Advanced Certification Program is announced during the conferring of the Vermont Commons School diploma at graduation.

So that colleges and universities to which the senior is applying understand the exceptional rigor and advanced academic nature of this program--and those rare individuals at Vermont Commons School who pursue it--a copy of this program policy from the *Vermont Commons School Guide for Students and Families* is to be included with all applications for admission to colleges and universities made by the student in the fall and/or winter of his or her senior year.

### **Application Process**

1. Check with your academic advisor to be sure that you have met the academic requirement based on completed VCS high school classes.
2. Inform the Chairs of the Social Studies and World Language Departments (in writing) that you are interested in pursuing the Global Citizen Certificate. Identify which two of the three you will pursue from requirements 3, 4, 5.
3. Find a GC Certificate Adviser.
  - a. You may choose to use your Senior Project to *conclude work already begun* on your GC Certificate Independent Project. If you do, then your Senior Project Adviser should be a member of the Social Studies or World Languages faculty, and will also be your GC Certificate Adviser. If not part of your Senior Project, you must identify a GC Certificate Adviser who will help you create your Project Proposal.
4. Propose your Independent Project.
  - a. Write and submit your GC Certificate Independent Project Proposal. See the attached Proposal Format.
  - b. The Social Studies/World Languages Department Chairs will review your proposal materials within two weeks of submission and let you know if the application has been approved, needs additional work, or has been denied.
5. Plan and Execute.
  - a. Once your proposal has been approved, create your Project Blog and Plan, and make it happen! See the attached GC Certificate Independent Project Guidelines.
6. Develop a written Presentation Plan
7. Plan to meet your chosen requirements (3, 4, 5) by your graduation.

## **ACADEMIC HONESTY AND PLAGIARISM**

Academic honesty is an essential component in a school setting. Misinforming or misleading peers or teachers in any way is unacceptable at Vermont Commons School, as at any academic setting.

Plagiarism is the attempt to present another person's work as one's own and often involves unattributed ideas or research, the copying of exact words, or paraphrasing. The reader is misled into believing that the writer's words or ideas are original when in fact they are taken from other sources. Some plagiarism is intentional, but it may just as often be unintentional or unintended; good intentions, however, do not make an adequate excuse for plagiarism when it is detected. Students therefore have an obligation to understand and use the conventions of documentation and citation or assume full responsibility--and consequence--for not doing so. Likewise, the giving or receiving of unauthorized assistance on any assignments or examinations is a further violation of academic honesty.

A student who is academically dishonest will face penalties, including failure on the assignment or exam in question, a failing grade in that class for the quarter or semester, suspension, or expulsion from the school, depending on the severity of the offense.

Students will be required to sign an oath during the first week of school stating that they understand and will abide by the school's rules against academic dishonesty. The students will be reminded of the oath as needed throughout the year; specifically at exams and the beginning of the Second Semester. The oath will read:

"I pledge that I will abide by the academic honesty tenets of Vermont Commons School and will neither give nor receive unauthorized aid during any academic exercise."

## **THE NATIONAL HONOR SOCIETY**

One of the oldest and most prestigious honor societies in the country, the National Honor Society recognizes and encourages excellence in high school students in the areas of academic achievement, leadership, character, and a willingness to render service to the community. Membership in our chapter is both an honor conferred by the faculty and a commitment by the student to continue to exhibit and develop these qualities. The faculty evaluate and induct students on a yearly basis. Sophomores, juniors, and seniors who have a GPA of 85% or higher and have been enrolled at the school for a full year are eligible to apply for membership in the National Honor Society.

## **III. STUDENT LIFE**

### **ADVISING PROGRAM**

#### **Individual Advisors**

6th grade students are advised by one of the 6th-grade teachers. Thereafter, each student is assigned an advisor who acts as a mentor and advocate for the student and the first point of contact for the parent/guardians over the course of a student's career. Students meet with their advisors on a

regular basis. At fall Parent/Teacher Conferences, and anytime as needed, the advisor will meet with parents/guardians and students to discuss any issues, set goals, and evaluate progress.

### **Core Group Advisors**

Students are grouped together by grade level and consequently spend most of the school day together with their core group. Each core group is assigned faculty advisors to help maintain a positive sense of group identity and work through any interpersonal issues that are having social or academic effects. The core group also may plan a variety of fun activities with their advisors over the course of the year, as well as hold regular meetings. Each core group elects representatives from the group to the Student Senate.

## **EXTRACURRICULAR SPORTS PROGRAM**

The primary mission of the athletic program is to foster collegiality, leadership, and personal growth. Student-athletes balance academic eligibility against responsibilities to their teammates. The team experience is open to any academically eligible, committed student. While the goal of any competition is to win, this is secondary to the primary mission. The following provides some basic tenets of the athletic program:

- Team sports are available to all students.
- Practices and games are considered extended campus events.
- Coaches hold attendance policies for both practices and games.
- The academic eligibility policy for all extra-curricular activities applies to all sports events.

## **COLLEGE COUNSELING PROGRAM**

The school is committed to supporting a student's finding and enrolling in a college or university that best matches the student's academic, individual, social, athletic, and geographic needs. Throughout the junior and senior year, the College Counseling Office keeps students and families informed of events related to the college admission process. Beginning in the spring of their junior year, students and parents work with the Director of Counseling to evaluate their individual strengths, personal growth, and academic profiles to create a list of colleges to which they will apply during their senior year. The school utilizes the online program *Naviance* to assist in the college search and application submission process; and the Director of Counseling works directly with students and parents throughout the entire cycle of college searching, application, and selection.

Many college and university representatives visit Vermont Commons School each fall and spring to meet with prospective students (parents are welcome to meet with college representatives as well). These college visits are listed on the Vermont Commons School Community Calendar, for easy access. Students are required to ask for their teacher's permission to miss class to meet with a college representative; they are responsible for making up work when missing a class due a college visit.

**Naviance:** Students are assigned accounts for this service during their Junior year. Once on Naviance, there are links to numerous college counseling search engines and related websites. Most important, however, is Naviance's Edocs service, which allows the uploading and submission of application materials to colleges and universities, from personal essays to letters of recommendations and

transcripts. Naviance provides each student with a personal (private) account that includes individualized information.

**Letters of recommendation:** Colleges and Universities generally require two to three letters of recommendation from faculty. In addition, the Director of Counseling is required to submit an official letter of recommendation from the school in support of the student's candidacy. A formal request by students to specific faculty members to write on their behalf should be made well prior to the conclusion of the junior year. Each student should prepare a resume to highlight their personal, academic and extracurricular activities; Naviance has a tool that can be used to help with this.

**Standardized Test Scores:** Students chart their standardized testing course while working closely with the Director of College Counseling. They also take into consideration the specific admission standards of the institutions to which they will apply. Vermont Commons School Juniors take the PSAT in October each year. Juniors and Seniors typically take the SAT or ACT twice (once in the spring of the junior year and a second time in the fall of the senior year) and three subject tests. The recommended timetable for this testing is as follows:

September:

- ACT, seniors

October:

- PSAT, juniors; SAT or SAT subject tests, seniors; ACT, seniors

November:

- SAT or SAT subject tests, seniors

April:

- ACT, juniors

May

- SAT or SAT subject tests, juniors

June

- SAT or SAT subject tests, juniors; ACT, juniors

Please note: Vermont Commons requires that each student request his or her own standardized test scores be sent to colleges and universities when submitting applications for admission. To request scores, use: [www.act.org](http://www.act.org) and [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com). Our school code is 460 417. Vermont Commons School only processes transcript requests for college admission applications via our online partner, Naviance. Students must request their transcripts one full month in advance of the application deadline in order for the Vermont Commons School Registrar to process the request. Students are responsible for submitting their actual applications, essays, fees, and supplemental forms by the prescribed due date to each institution to which they are applying for admission. Vermont Commons School prepares an official online folder through Naviance that includes the student's transcript and letters of recommendation and sends it to the colleges and universities to which the student is applying.

If a student has completed coursework or an official program for credit at another institution, the student must make a separate request to that institution to send official transcripts to colleges or universities to which the student is applying; *Vermont Commons can neither obtain nor submit official transcripts from another institution.* Upon graduating from Vermont Commons School, the school sends a copy of our final transcript to the enrolling institution for each graduating senior, marking his or her official graduation from the school.

**Reporting disciplinary information to colleges and universities:** As an institution grounded in honesty and respect, Vermont Commons School expects that students will answer all questions on secondary or college applications truthfully, including those questions dealing with disciplinary issues. In this regard, information on formal Vermont Commons School letters of reference will reflect the requirements of the Common Application or application of the specific college or school to which they will be sent. Expulsions or other major disciplinary actions will be reported by Vermont Commons School to the schools or colleges to which a student has applied. If asked by an admissions officer about information on an application, Vermont Commons School personnel will answer those questions honestly, and to the best of their knowledge. If a disciplinary matter occurs after an application has been submitted, it is expected that students will inform the school(s) of any resulting change in their status at Vermont Commons School, including suspension or dismissal.

## STUDENT SENATE

The Student Senate serves as a council of student advisors to the administration in order to maintain communication between students and the faculty and administration. The Senate provides opportunities for students to develop leadership skills and to voice their concerns and ideas in a formal manner. Students provide advice and assistance to the faculty and administration through:

- Organizing activities such as dances, community service, outings, and special events
- Representing the school in various events as hosts and guides, and in public.
- Helping Vermont Commons School remain a positive, respectful, and supportive community
- Addressing other items and needs of the student body

Each core group has representatives who serve on the Senate. The student body elects these students during a core group meeting early in the spring of each year. Students who wish to serve on the Senate have an opportunity to declare their candidacy on Election Day. Students address their core group and state their goals and objectives. The election is by closed ballot and sorted by the faculty advisor. Students may be elected to serve consecutive terms.

It is the responsibility of the student body to communicate their suggestions to the representatives in their group. The Student Senate meets periodically with the faculty advisor, a formal opportunity for students to voice any of the suggestions and/or concerns arising from the student body. The Faculty Advisor meets on a regular basis with the Head of School in order to address the most constructive suggestions and legitimate concerns of the Senate. The faculty advisor communicates the Head of School's responses to the Senate at the next meeting.

The student body also elects a President of the Senate, at the same time of year as the elections for the other representatives. The President of the Student Body has several additional responsibilities:

**Student Body President and Board of Trustees involvement:**

- Invited to Board meetings as a guest at during the year
- Serves on Board Committees with other Senators as needed

**Other responsibilities:**

- Represent the school for marketing/promotion at school fairs, Open Houses, and other events
- Involvement in graduation ceremony
- Plan, oversee and lead Student Senate meetings
- Occasional presentations to the faculty at faculty meetings
- Serve on an as-needed basis on various school committees
- Serves as the voice of student body when one is sought for decisions

## SENIOR PRIVILEGES

Senior privileges are granted to the seniors with the understanding that they will continue to earn the respect of the Vermont Commons School community and maintain their roles as community leaders. Parents may request the withholding of these privileges; should they choose to do so, that request should come to the Dean of Students.

- Seniors may arrive at school at 9:20 a.m. for morning meeting if they have a study hall 1<sup>st</sup> period.
- Seniors may leave campus for lunch provided they return for the beginning of 4<sup>th</sup> period.
- Seniors may leave campus for an extended lunch provided they have a 3<sup>rd</sup> period study hall and they return by the beginning of 4<sup>th</sup> period.
- Seniors may leave campus for an extended lunch provided they have a 4<sup>th</sup> period study hall and they return by the beginning of 5<sup>th</sup> period.
- Seniors may leave school at 2:30 if they have a study hall scheduled last period.
- Seniors may *not* leave for lunch if they have a meeting or are responsible for lunch clean up.
- Seniors *must* sign out when leaving and sign in when returning at the front desk.

## IV. COMMUNITY STANDARDS

### ATTENDANCE AND ABSENCES

The school day begins at 8:30 AM and ends at 3:30 PM. Parents should notify the school in the morning if a child

- will be late to school, for any reason
- will be absent, for any reason
- needs to be excused from school during the day (even if the child is to return later in the day).

To notify the school of any of the above, parents should call the school, prior to the first period, at 802-865-8084. Parents should leave a message in the “General Mailbox” if the receptionist does not answer in person. Parents may also send an email to Katherine Bailey, Assistant to the Head of

School, at [kbailey@vermontcommons.org](mailto:kbailey@vermontcommons.org). A student must sign in and out at the Front Office whenever s/he arrives late, leaves school during the day, or returns to school after leaving.

Tardiness to any class is disrespectful and disruptive. If a student accumulates 3 tardies, an appropriate response is coordinated by the Dean of Students or Director of the Middle School (as appropriate) and a letter will be sent home. If a student accumulates 6 tardies, the Dean of Students or Director of the Middle School will coordinate a meeting with the student and parents to determine an appropriate course of action that will help the student get to class on time.

## **Planned Absences**

Attendance is expected every day that school is in session; Encounter Weeks are considered school in session. Family vacations should occur only during the scheduled school vacations so that students are able to attend when school is in session. When events such as college visits, weddings, or other family travel arise that demand a student's absence, parents/guardians must request the granting of an Excused Absence from the Assistant Head of School with as much advance notice as possible (at least two weeks notice is required). If an Excused Absence is granted, students should communicate directly with their teachers to inform them of their plans and arrange to make up work missed. Teachers will, to the extent possible, make reasonable arrangements to support the student as he or she plans for and catches up from anticipated absences. Routine medical appointments should, whenever possible, be scheduled during non-class times. In the case of religious holidays or unexpected emergencies, parents should notify the front desk of such an absence at their earliest convenience, so that teachers can begin making plans for helping the student catch up.

## **Absences and Missed Assignments**

Whenever possible, assignments should be presented to faculty on the day the student returns to school. Upon their return, students are expected to be prepared for class with all assignments handed in as soon as possible. In cases of extended absence, extensions of homework deadlines are often warranted. However, this accommodation should be discussed and agreed upon on the day of the student's return; the typical extension in number of days is one times the number of days absent, up to a maximum of no more than two weeks time. Work submitted after two weeks will typically receive no credit in the course. It is the responsibility of the student to communicate with the teacher in a timely fashion if an extension is sought. Extensions are typically given when due dates fall during an absence or immediately follow an absence.

## **Medical Leave**

If a student is unable to participate fully in the school program due to medical (physical or psychological) reasons, the school may require the student to take a medical leave of absence from school. Medical leaves are treated as excused absences, and a doctor's note is required in all cases. Appropriate administrators will review all situations requiring a medical leave. Although a leave may in some cases be limited to a reduced workload rather than a full leave, students are encouraged to continue to produce academic work during their leave. Medical leave does not safeguard credit until

all coursework is completed. Medical leaves that exceed one quarter will place the student's matriculation to the next grade level in jeopardy. Students on Medical Leave may not participate in school extracurricular, athletic, or social activities.

### **Unexcused Absences**

Leaving school without permission or failure to inform the registrar of an absence is considered an unexcused absence. At a minimum, no credit is given to any work submitted or completed that is due during the time of the unexcused absence. Given the necessity of being present for much of the work at Vermont Commons School, there may be no opportunity to make up missed quizzes, tests, or other assessments that occurred during the time a student missed school for an unexcused absence.

### **Excessive Absences**

Any student who is absent--even for excused reasons--for five scheduled school days (including Encounter Weeks) in any quarter, or a cumulative total of 20 days over the course of the academic year, places in jeopardy his or her course credit for the year and/or ability to matriculate into the next academic grade level. The same criteria is used on a class-by-class basis: if these same quantities of days are missed in any single class, the student's ability to pass that class is similarly jeopardized. In such instances, the student and parents will be required to meet with the the Assistant Head of School, the Dean of Students, and the student's advisor to determine an appropriate course of action.

### **Extended absences**

Students occasionally have reason to be absent from school for an extended period of time. If this is due to health reasons, it will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. If it is because of a planned trip or activity, the following policy applies:

**For absences of 5 or fewer school days (and if the student has missed no other days during that quarter),** notify the Assistant Head of School at least 2 school weeks in advance to request approval. The expectation will generally be that the student complete all of the coursework, tests, etc. in all of their classes, on a schedule determined by their teachers. It is the responsibility of the student to communicate with their teachers in advance regarding their absence, and to understand the expectations regarding their academic responsibilities, deadlines, etc.

**Given that such a scenario would immediately place the student in the category of having excessive absences (see above), requests for longer absences will be addressed on a case-by-case basis.**

### **Student Study Abroad/Away**

Vermont Commons School supports student study away/abroad during their time at the school. Students wishing to study away/abroad and return to Vermont Commons School will be guaranteed a place in the school upon return if they adhere to the following:

- The program and courses studied away/abroad, and upon return, must be approved by the Department Chairs Committee four months before leaving. The application must include a written request stating why the student wants to do this and what he/she will gain from the



experience. A complete description of the program must be included. Two faculty recommendations are also required.

- Requests for study abroad will be handled on a first-come-first-served basis each year. A request for a full year away/abroad will not be allowed for senior year. Students are encouraged to apply for and attend study away/abroad before senior year and during spring semesters. Students must be in good academic standing (with a GPA of 85% in current courses) throughout the process; including at the time they leave.
- The Department Chairs may require students to take and pass specific courses before leaving, during the summer, or on the program itself. A formal transcript from the program or school attended is required upon return. Grades earned in other programs will **not** be calculated into the Vermont Commons School GPA.
- Students are required to present a summary of their experiences to the school community--or a specified committee--upon return. Guidelines for the presentation will be set up by the Department Chairs Committee before the student leaves.

## OFF-CAMPUS SENIOR YEAR COURSE

- Seniors may be eligible to pursue a year of study in one subject outside of Vermont Commons, if they are behaviorally and academically in good standing in all of their classes, and if their cumulative GPA in that subject in the three preceding high school years is an 87% or above.
- They must be enrolled in coursework for the entire year (so a semester course in college does not count as two semesters of Vermont Commons coursework). Credits earned elsewhere will count in lieu of Vermont Commons credits towards the Vermont Commons graduation requirement. Students will not attend the course they would normally take at Vermont Commons in this discipline.
- They must pass all coursework undertaken elsewhere. Failure to do so means they will not graduate and will not subsequently receive a Vermont Commons degree and diploma until they have completed and passed comparable coursework. Because colleges and universities, due to privacy laws and practices, will not communicate with us about a student's progress or lack thereof in their coursework, we will be unable to speak to or guarantee the success of students in their work outside Vermont Commons, but our faculty will support, work with, and attempt to assist students to the extent possible.
- The Vermont Commons schedule cannot be altered to accommodate college schedules. In general courses taken elsewhere will need to be scheduled outside of our school day.
- Fees or tuitions incurred in taking coursework elsewhere is the responsibility of the student's family; Vermont Commons will not be able to offer a rebate for a course not taken here.
- Students must propose outside coursework in the semester preceding their senior year to the Department Chairs, who will review their request and decide whether or not to approve it.

## STUDY HALL

Students attend study hall periods each week with the expectation that they will seek out extra help and work independently or with peers to complete assignments and prepare for class. Expectations of students in study hall vary by grade, as follows:

- **6th Graders:** 6th graders do not have scheduled study halls in the first semester. Core teachers may decide to use some classroom time to create a study hall environment.
- **7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> Graders:** All students must attend faculty-monitored study halls and attend to schoolwork during the periods.
- **9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> Graders:** All students must attend faculty-monitored study halls and attend to schoolwork during the periods, unless the student has made the Honor Roll at the end of the previous quarter. Study hall is required of 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders during the First Quarter, before Honor Roll is released. Watch and Support may place students in Faculty monitored study halls.
- **11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> Graders:** Students do not need to attend faculty-monitored study halls unless they are on Academic Probation or placed there by Watch & Support.

Students not required to be in faculty-monitored study halls must remain on campus, except for seniors with senior privileges. Students not required to be in study hall have a free period and can use it as they wish, provided they are not distracting the educational experience of others. Music is only allowed if a student uses headphones.

## LUNCH & FOOD

At the Vermont Commons School, community is valued. In order to encourage and facilitate our sense of community--and to keep our school clean--we ask that students and faculty eat lunch only in the Lunch Room or outside. After students eat, they may choose to spend time in the Art Studio, outside on the school grounds, or meeting with teachers. With the exception of water, all food and beverages are to be limited to the kitchen and cafeteria except as permitted by classroom teachers. During special events in the Commons Room, food and beverages may be served and consumed in the non-carpeted area between the Arts Wing and the Commons Room. The intent of lunch as part of our time together in community is that it be screen-free: the use of phones, computers, and all other internet-capable devices is discouraged at this time.

## AFTER SCHOOL PICK-UP AND SUPERVISION

The school building remains open with adult supervision until 4:30 p.m. each weekday that school is in session. Students not transporting themselves must be picked up by 4:30 p.m., as the building is locked at that time and the school no longer offers adult supervision, nor the certainty of adults present, thereafter.

Middle school students remaining in the building after 3:30 will be supervised until 4:30. If they are not in a supervised activity, such as athletics or After School Study, they must join the after school monitor in the lunchroom no later than 3:35, where they must stay until picked up, no later than 4:30 p.m.

## DRESS CODE

Vermont Commons School strives to provide a safe, comfortable learning environment free from distractions. In order to create this atmosphere, we ask that students refrain from wearing revealing, suggestive, or inappropriate clothing, such as items with references to or images related to drugs, alcohol, violence, or intolerance.

## DISCIPLINE

Our disciplinary philosophy is informed by the tenets of Restorative Justice. This process involves seeking avenues for “offenders” to take responsibility for their actions, make amends to others who were negatively impacted, and educate themselves on the impact of their actions. The primary aim of all disciplinary actions is to restore the safe environment of the school, repair any damage done, and restore the offender to his or her valued place in the community.

When incidents occur, the following protocol is generally followed:

- Faculty report the incident to the Dean of Students or the Director of the Middle School, depending on the grade level(s) of the student(s) involved.
- The Dean of Students and/or Director of Middle School review the incident with the faculty member, student(s) involved, and others if appropriate.
- The Dean of Students and/or Director of Middle school may meet with parents, the student’s advisor, or other community members to review and discuss the incident.
- The Dean of Students and/or Director of Middle School make a decision regarding any action to be taken. Depending on the incident and history of the student, a wide range of disciplinary responses may be considered, including service to the community, written apologies, behavioral warning or probation, suspension, other responses deemed to be appropriate to the situation, or dismissal from the school. In all actions, students and parents are informed of the result and a notation is made in the student’s file.

### **Classroom management**

It is imperative that teachers are able to maintain an atmosphere conducive to learning in their classrooms. Teachers employ a wide range of techniques and strategies to manage their classrooms productively. When a student’s behavior interferes with the teacher’s ability to conduct the class and/or with their classmates’ abilities to engage productively with the class material, the student may be asked to leave class and to report to the school receptionist, who will locate the Dean of Students or Middle School Director.

When this occurs, the Dean of Students and/or Director of Middle School will have a conversation with the student and will notify the parents. Follow up will depend on the circumstances and the ability of the student to modify the behavior in the future. If a student is asked to leave any class more than once in a semester, a meeting will be held with the student’s parents/guardians, the student, and appropriate school staff. The student may not return to class until all parties are satisfied that the student is ready to do so productively.

## WEAPONS POLICY

It is the policy of Vermont Commons School to comply with the federal Gun Free Schools Act of 1994, and 16 V.S.A. §1166 requiring schools to provide for the dismissal of students who bring weapons to school. In addition, any student who brings a firearm to or possesses a firearm at school shall be referred to a law enforcement agency. In addition to any other action the law enforcement agency may take, it may report the incident to the department of social and rehabilitation services.

Modifications to the aforementioned policy may be granted in circumstances such as but not limited to:

- The pupil is unaware that he or she has brought a firearm to or possessed a firearm at school.
- The pupil is disabled and the misconduct is related to the disability.

Students are also forbidden from bringing knives to school. Doing so may result in severe disciplinary action, up to and including suspension or expulsion from school.

## HAZING, BULLYING, AND HARASSMENT POLICY

The Vermont Commons School is committed to providing all students with a safe and supportive school environment. Members of the school community are expected to treat each other with mutual respect and to embrace the rich diversity that makes up the community. Disrespect among members of the school community is unacceptable behavior that threatens to disrupt the learning environment and decreases self-esteem. Hazing, Bullying, and Harassment are forms of unlawful discrimination as well as disrespectful behaviors that have no place in the school and that will not be tolerated. Accordingly, the school prohibits hazing, bullying, and harassment and will ensure the enforcement thereof, including reporting to the appropriate authorities should civil penalties be at stake.

It is hereby the policy of Vermont Commons School to oppose and prohibit, without qualification, unlawful hazing, bullying, or harassment based on race, color, age, religion or belief (creed), national origin, gender or sexual identity, marital status, or disability. Any unlawful bullying, hazing, or harassment of a student by a member of the school community is a violation of this policy as well as some state and federal statutes.

The Vermont Commons School shall act to investigate all complaints of bullying, hazing, or harassment, formal or informal, verbal or written, and will discipline or take appropriate action against any member of the school community who is found to have violated this policy.

Complaints of Hazing, Bullying, or Harassment may furthermore be made by the school or individual to the Vermont Human Rights Commission and the federal Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights.

***Special Notice of Prohibition Against Bullying and Anti-Bullying Interventions:***

*Bullying is a form of dangerous and disrespectful behavior that may involve a range of misconduct that, based on the severity, will warrant a measured response of corrective action and/or discipline.*

*Bullying is defined as any overt act or combination of such acts directed against a student by another student or group of students and which*

*Occurs during the school day on school property, on a school bus, or at a school-sponsored activity;*

*Is intended to ridicule, humiliate, or intimidate the student; and*

*Is repeated over time.<sup>1</sup>*

*Behaviors that do not rise to the level of bullying, as defined above, still may be subject to intervention and/or discipline under another section of the discipline plan or a discipline policy.*

### **Reporting, Investigating, and Notifying Parents of Harassment, Hazing, or Bullying Reports**

To address harassment, hazing, and bullying, Vermont Commons School

(a) Encourages students to report personally or anonymously to teachers and school administrators such acts.<sup>2</sup> Vermont Commons School has established the following methods for such reporting:

- Anonymous Reporting: Dean of Students' and/or Director of Middle School's Mailboxes
- Personal Reporting: Dean of Students and/or Director of Middle School, Vermont Commons School, 75 Green Mountain Drive, So. Burlington, VT 05403, 802-865-8084

(b) Encourages parents or guardians of student to file written reports of suspected hazing, harassment, or bullying. *See (a) above.*

(c) Requires teachers and other school staff who witness acts of harassment, hazing, or bullying or receive student reports of same to notify the Dean of Students and/or Director of Middle School promptly.

(d) Requires the Dean of Students and/or Director of Middle School to accept and review all reports of hazing, harassment, and bullying, including anonymous reports. If after inquiry, an anonymous or oral report appears to warrant further investigation, school administrators shall promptly continue with an investigation. School administrators shall investigate any written reports.

(e) As with any other disciplinary action, this policy requires school staff to notify the parent or guardian of a student who commits a verified act of hazing, harassment, or bullying of the response of the school staff and consequences that may result from further acts.

(f) To the extent permitted under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, (FERPA), requires school staff to notify the parent or guardian of a student who is a target of hazing, harassment, or bullying of the action taken to prevent any further acts of bullying.<sup>3</sup>

For further explanation, see the Dean of Students and/or Director of Middle School or Vermont Statutes Online at:

[http://www.vermont.gov/cgi-bin/vt\\_legis/fullsection.cfm?Title=16&Chapter=009&Section=00570a&form\\_access\\_date=20150721](http://www.vermont.gov/cgi-bin/vt_legis/fullsection.cfm?Title=16&Chapter=009&Section=00570a&form_access_date=20150721)

<sup>1</sup>Conduct that might otherwise be considered bullying but does not occur during the school day, on school property, on a school bus, or at a school-sponsored event still may be subject to disciplinary action pursuant to 16 V.S.A. §1162(a) and 1162; however, such misconduct would not meet the definition of bullying.

<sup>2</sup>Any student, who knowingly makes false accusations regarding bullying, may be subject to disciplinary action.

<sup>3</sup>FERPA is a federal law designed to protect the confidentiality of student records and the school district must comply with this law, as well as a similar state law. When the school administrator contacts a parent about the school district's response to a bullying incident, he/she may discuss information about an investigation and corrective action taken, but only to the extent that it may be done without disclosing information about any students other than the student subjected to the bullying.

## **DRUG/ALCOHOL POLICY**

The use or possession of illegal drugs and alcohol on campus or at any school activity will not be tolerated. Students who possess or use illegal drugs or alcohol on campus or at any school activity or attend school or school activity under the influence of illegal drugs or alcohol will be dismissed.

## **SMOKE-FREE CAMPUS POLICY**

Vermont Commons is a smoke-free and tobacco free campus. Smoking and tobacco use is forbidden at all school events, on or off campus.

## **NUT-FREE SCHOOL POLICY**

Vermont Commons School recognizes that it is impossible to keep nuts out of a school and away from all of its activities as a school. It also recognizes that we have several students in our community with serious, life-threatening nut allergies. To the extent possible, all members of the school community--students, parents/guardians, faculty, etc.--should attempt to keep the school building nut-free and to keep all nuts away from school vehicles, shuttle buses on the bus routes, school trips, Encounter Weeks, and any other places or activities under control of the school community where our several nut-allergic students might encounter nuts and have a life-threatening reaction.

Parents/Guardians with children with nut allergies are requested to provide permission to treat allergic reactions to nuts and to deliver to the school by the start of the school year (and keep up-to-date throughout the school year) appropriate medication, such as *epinephrine*, so that school personnel may administer such medications in emergencies.

## **DOG-FREE BUILDING POLICY**

The Vermont Commons School building is a dog-free building. Please keep your pets under control at all times if you bring them to campus, and please clean up after them as needed.

## OFF CAMPUS BEHAVIOR POLICY

All Vermont Commons School students are expected to be responsible representatives of the school at all times whether they are on or off campus and whether school is in session or not. Student behavior at events, competitions, practices, online forums and social media, or any other school or school-related activity on or off campus that adversely affects the school community or reputation may result in disciplinary action, including dismissal from school.

## PERSONAL PROPERTY

Vermont Commons School is a community where students move freely throughout the building. Our community is built on trust and respect for each other, and this extends to personal property; nonetheless, students should take care of their valuables and not leave them unattended throughout the building. Lack of care towards another's personal property is a grievous offense against both that individual and the community trust as a whole and is responded to accordingly.

## STUDENT DRIVING AND PARKING

How a student travels to and from Vermont Commons School is the responsibility of the parents. If a student is allowed to drive to school, the student should abide by Vermont Commons School' policy for parking on campus as outlined below:

- Vermont Commons School is not responsible for the vehicle or its contents on school grounds or during school events.
- The owner of the vehicle is responsible for maintaining auto insurance required by state law.
- In the event of an accident on campus, the owners are responsible for calling the police and filing an accident report. All accidents must be reported to school administration as well.
- Owners must practice safe driving at all times: pedestrians have the right of way.
- Upon arriving at school, students who drive may not leave the school grounds without permission (unless the student is a senior with senior privileges).
- Student vehicles are subject to search by school officials if reasonable grounds exist.
- Students may only transport other students in their cars with special permission granted by parents through the summer mailing forms sent out by the registrar and approved by the administration.

## SHUTTLE AND BUS EXPECTATIONS

It is a privilege to ride the buses, and this privilege may be revoked at anytime if these simple expectations are not met:

- Students are expected to be courteous and respectful to the bus driver and other students at all times.
- The bus driver is in charge, and students must follow the directions of the bus driver.
- Students are required by state law to wear their seatbelts at all times.
- Computers and cell phones are permitted on the bus, but if they distract the bus driver or others in any way, this privilege of riding on the shuttle will be revoked.
- There will be no loud noises, yelling, or distracting conversations on the bus.
- The time posted on the shuttle schedule is when the shuttle will LEAVE the scheduled station. The bus driver will not wait for a student.
- Only scheduled stations on the shuttle routes will be stopped at; there are no exceptions. Students cannot be dropped off at their houses or other destinations not on the scheduled routes.
- Any vandalism of the buses will result in immediate suspension of bus riding privileges.
- Students are responsible for their own belongings. Students are responsible for cleaning the area of the bus where they are seated.

If these expectations are not met, bus drivers will inform the appropriate administrator. Depending on the infraction, consequences may result in either suspension or revocation of the shuttle and/or bus riding privileges, in which case parents/guardians would be responsible for the transportation of their son or daughter to school and/or events and field trips.

## CRISIS MANAGEMENT COMMANDS

- **Clear the Halls:** Go to closest room supervised by an adult. Close and lock the door. Students and staff remain away from doors and windows. Use phone only for emergencies. Classroom instruction may continue. *This command is communicated in person.*
- **Secure the School:** Students outdoors enter the building. All students go to closest room supervised by an adult. Adults close doors and lock if possible. Students and staff remain away from doors and windows and stay low to the floor. Turn off lights and shut curtains/blinds on doors and windows (if available). Administrators secure outside doors. *This command is communicated in person and by RenWeb alert.*
- **Evacuate the Building:** In an orderly fashion, move out of the building by class, at the nearest exit. Move to the North parking lot area and meet in Advisor groups. Advisors take attendance with advisees. Students without an advisor meet with the Registrar. The Administrator on duty will check in with Advisors who will have taken attendance of their advisees. Students must remain quiet for further instructions by the administrator on duty. Wait for the “all clear” signal before returning to the building and resuming class. *This command is communicated by the building’s fire alarm system.*



In case of other emergency responses, students are required to follow procedures outlined by the faculty and administration. Faculty members are encouraged to carry cell phones in case of emergency.

## CELL PHONES

Vermont Commons School prefers that students not bring cell phones to school or into the school building; however, if students do bring them, the school requires that the cell phones be turned off or set to silent mode upon entering. Making or receiving calls or text messages during school hours interferes with the learning environment. If a cell phone is seen or heard during class periods, the student may be required to surrender it to a faculty member for the remainder of the day. In addition, Vermont Commons School respectfully requests that parents/guardians refrain from calling or texting their children's phones between the hours of 8:30-3:30. Parents may contact the front desk to deliver messages to students during the day and, if needed, students may use the 2nd floor student phone (in the copy room) or the receptionist's phone to contact parents/guardians during the school day.

## COMPUTER USE POLICY

### General Purpose

Vermont Commons School makes available computing and network resources that may be used by Vermont Commons School students, faculty, and staff. These resources are intended to be used for educational purposes, communications, and to carry out the legitimate business of Vermont Commons School. The purpose of the Computer Use Policy is to set forth appropriate guidelines and responsibilities regarding Vermont Commons School's computing resources, maintain the highest confidentiality of stored information, and promote the highest educational usage of Vermont Commons School's computer resources. All information on Vermont Commons School-owned and/or administered computers, networks, and domain is the property of Vermont Commons School. Vermont Commons School reserves the right to examine and/or seize any data, regardless of its nature, on any Vermont Commons School owned and/or administered computer or domain at any time.

### Appropriate Use Statement

Vermont Commons School encourages the responsible expression and sharing of ideas and information with comprehensive access to local, national, and international facilities. Thus, it is the responsibility of all who use these resources to respect the intellectual, access, and privacy rights of others who use the resources. In this vein, we ask that **computers only be used for academic purposes during the school day**. Acceptable uses of computer resources include instructional use in classes, faculty research, administrative support, legitimate student organizations' use, or other approved purposes. Students should not use computers for video games or to watch non-academic videos or movies during school hours (8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.). Video games with an M rating or movies

or videos with an R rating (outside of class where specific permission has been obtained by a teacher) are not acceptable at any time on campus.

Use that is illegal or inappropriate in nature and therefore unacceptable includes (but is not limited to)

- Downloading, copying, viewing, or distributing pornographic, or otherwise offensive text, photos, e-mail, or other files
- Downloading, copying, sharing, or distributing copyrighted files
- Online harassment of individuals through chat rooms or social networking sites.

Illegal or inappropriate use will be considered a violation of this policy and will result in a disciplinary response including loss of computer privileges while at school. Students will work with faculty to discuss and determine other approved purposes for computer use while at school.

## Information Technologies

Vermont Commons School provides a variety of ways to access information and faculty, including the school website and Google calendars, RenWeb, and the Remote Desktop Server on which students and faculty can save and share documents. Homework can be printed from the school server to any of the networked printers. We recommend that students email themselves assignments and print from our computer lab or student printers if they cannot print at home.

By logging onto our web page, [www.vermontcommons.org](http://www.vermontcommons.org), and clicking on My Vermont Commons School, parents and students can access web-based **email** (for students) and **RenWeb**, an online portal to grades, assignments, and other school related documents such as forms and account information. Vermont Commons School uses a Google Calendar to communicate community events. This calendar is embedded in our web site, and visitors may subscribe. **RenWeb's ParentsWeb** is a private and secure parents' portal that allows parents to view academic information specific to their children, while protecting their children's information from others. Student's grades, attendance, homework, and conduct, as well as other useful school information is available. To access **RenWeb ParentsWeb**:

- First, ensure that the school has your email address in RenWeb.
- Next, go to [www.renweb.com](http://www.renweb.com) and click **Logins**.
- Click **ParentsWeb Login**.
- Type your school's **District Code Vermont Commons School-VT**
- Click **Create New ParentsWeb Account**.
- Type your email address and an email will be sent to you.
- Click the **Click to change password** link. This link is only valid for 30 minutes.
- Type a **User Name, Password** and **Confirm** the password.
- Click **Save Password**.
- You can now log into ParentsWeb using your new User Name and Password.

Please contact the Registrar, Steve Lausier, with questions.

## **V. Just For Parents**

### **Parents' Association of the Commons School (PACS)**

The mission of the Parents' Association of the Commons School (PACS) is to strengthen the partnership between parents and the school through communication and community involvement to benefit the education of our students. The overarching goal of PACS is to facilitate communication between parents and the School while providing opportunities for parents to connect with one another, broaden their understanding of the School, and make positive contributions through their volunteer efforts. Through programs, special events, and volunteer efforts, PACS supports the mission of the School and works to foster the sense of community Vermont Commons School strives to achieve.

### **Financial Aid**

Vermont Commons School tries to help every family in need afford the cost of tuition. The maximum financial aid grant is 80% of a student's tuition. Thus, we ask that each family receiving financial aid pay a minimum of 20% of their student's full tuition. This 20% tuition requirement applies to families from tuition sending towns as well. Families must reapply for financial aid each year during the normal admissions or re-enrollment period (typically February 15-May 1). Applications for aid outside of the normal admissions/enrollment period will be acted upon according to the school's capacity to do so at the time. The determination of an award and/or the amount of an award cannot be changed mid-year, despite changing financial circumstance in a recipient family. An award one year is not a guarantee of an award or the same proportional award thereafter; changes in awards typically arise due to a changing financial status of the school or parents. In accordance with the best practices established by the National Association of Independent Schools (the School's accrediting body), it is the goal of the School each year to distribute 16.5% of its operating budget in financial aid awards to families with need. For more information or for help in managing financial aid needs and awards, contact the Business Director, Linda Bursell.

### **Tuition Insurance**

Families are required to purchase tuition insurance on any amount of tuition they pay to the school in order to insure them against loss. Families from tuition granting towns are required to pay tuition insurance on both their tuition monies and the tuition from the sending town. Families paying their full tuition in advance may choose not to insure their payment. For questions regarding tuition insurance or any issues with tuition billing or payments, contact the Business Director, Linda Bursell.

## Directory

Typically the school directory is printed and distributed to parents early in the school year. The school directory is also available anytime on RenWeb. To access it, follow these steps:

- Login as usual
- On the left-hand side-bar, under “School Information,” select “Directory”
- On the next page, the directory will appear. Select “Family” or “School Staff,” depending on whose information you need
- The family directory can be sorted primarily by the “Students” or “Parents” tab
- The directory can be further sorted according to “name,” “address,” “city” or “postal code”
- You can print a hard copy of the directory by clicking on the “Print” button at the top right

## VI. Vermont Agency of Education Statements

The Vermont Agency and Board of Education NEASC Approved Independent Schools renewal application requires the following Statute and statement appear in at least one Vermont Commons School publication provided to parents and guardians:

- Vermont State Board of Education Statute 166 (b)(3) reads: *“An approved independent school shall provide to the parent or guardian responsible for each of its pupils, prior to accepting any money for that pupil, an accurate statement in writing of its status under this section, and a copy of this section. Failure to comply with this provision may create a permissible inference of false advertising in violation of 13 V.S.A. § 2005.”*
- Vermont Commons School’s status with the Board of Education is an Approved Independent School for grades 6-12; per the Board’s categories of Approved Independent Schools, Vermont Commons School is a NEASC-Accredited Approved Independent School.

### VERMONT COMMONS SCHOOL

75 Green Mountain Drive, South Burlington, Vermont 05403

[www.vermontcommons.org](http://www.vermontcommons.org) (802) 865-8084