

# Guide for Students and Families rev. 10/7/24

The purpose of this guide is to give students and families a general understanding 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, 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 third 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

Scholarship. Community. Global Responsibility.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Scholarship is engagement with an academically rigorous curriculum fostering independent thinking and intellectual curiosity.
- Through direct interaction and application of skills and knowledge, the world is our classroom, lab, and studio.
- Our community values respect for self and others, honesty and integrity, and diverse backgrounds and perspectives.
- Global responsibility emerges from the understanding that our choices and actions impact our communities and require a commitment to service.
- Environmental stewardship arises through experience and informed appreciation of the interdependence between oneself and the natural world.
- Health and wellness results from an intentional balance of one's academics, activities, emotional needs, and social interactions.
- Leadership is cultivated through dedicated training and continuous opportunities.
- Collaboration between students and faculty forms the fabric of the Vermont Commons experience.

## 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

student affairs, advisors

Encounter Weeks

IT, forms, Blackbaud, communications

college counseling

athletics

business office, billings, financial aid

daily attendance

making a gift to VCS

volunteering & parent ambassadors

getting a message to your child

### **Your first contact should be:**

→ the Classroom Teacher

→ your child's advisor

→ the Department Chair

→ Jasmine Easter

→ Tim Harger

→ Kathryn McDermott

→ Katherine Bailey

→ Eliot Sloan

→ Tim Harger

→ Linda Bursell

→ [attendance@vermontcommons.org](mailto:attendance@vermontcommons.org)

→ Sharon Panitch

→ Kat Nelson

→ [frontdesk@vermontcommons.org](mailto:frontdesk@vermontcommons.org) or  
802-865-8084

## II. ACADEMIC LIFE, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES

### ACADEMIC HONOR CODE

Honesty is the foundation of the academic enterprise. We value a culture of trust, and expect that your work represents the learning you have done. Ultimately, academic honesty strengthens your learning and honors the efforts of your teachers and classmates.

All academic work is both a process of learning and a way for your teacher to evaluate your learning. Thus, students who are dishonest harm the culture of the school and also do themselves a disservice by failing to learn the material. Misinforming or misleading peers and teachers in any way is unacceptable at Vermont Commons School, as in any academic setting. Good intentions do not make an adequate excuse for academic dishonesty. There are several common ways that students run afoul of academic honesty expectations: plagiarism, cheating, improper collaboration, and lying.

**Plagiarism** is the attempt to present another person's work as your own, whether it is their ideas, research, or words. The reader is misled into believing that the writer's words or ideas are original when in fact they are borrowed from other sources. While some plagiarism is intentional, it is sometimes the result of carelessness. Learning the correct strategies for attribution – quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing – is essential, as is taking careful notes during research, especially from on-line resources. Therefore, students have an obligation to understand and use the conventions of documentation and citing sources and take full responsibility for not doing so.

Giving or receiving **unauthorized assistance** on graded work (assignments, projects, labs, or assessments) is another violation of the conventions of academic honesty. Some examples include copying another person's answers on a test, getting unacknowledged or unauthorized assistance from either a person or a computer, submitting another student's data analysis as one's own, and unauthorized collaboration. No part of any graded work should be written by an artificial intelligence (AI) platform unless the instructor says otherwise. This includes, but is not limited to, examples such as Grammarly's AI features, ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Microsoft Copilot, and Apple Intelligence.

**Collaborative work** presents special challenges because much of learning involves interacting and working with others. Improper collaboration, however, has much in common with plagiarism. Specifically, it is an act of representing another's work as your own. It is the student's responsibility to understand the expectations around collaboration on each assignment. Faculty encourage students to engage in conversation about the expectations.

**Lying** will not be tolerated. Interacting from a place of honesty creates the fabric of a strong community. Being honest about when assignments were completed and other aspects of academics is essential.

A student who is academically dishonest will face a penalty ranging from loss of credit on the assignment to dismissal from school, depending on the seriousness of the offense.

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## **HOMEWORK**

Homework is an essential component of scholarship at Vermont Commons School. It gives students opportunities to practice what they have learned, extend their learning, explore new concepts, and prepare material for upcoming classes.

### **Live By Five**

Homework is posted on Blackbaud by 5pm the day it is assigned in class, and all necessary resources (e.g., a scanned reading posted on Google Classroom) are also accessible by 5pm. On the day it is assigned, teachers announce a homework assignment out loud in class, write it on the board, and set aside a few minutes to take clarifying questions about the assignment. Additionally, teachers of Middle School students instruct students to write the assignment in their planners and give time for this in class.

### **Weekends**

Teachers may assign one night's worth of homework to be completed over the weekend. Students can spend weekends working on long-term projects or doing more than one night's worth of homework, but they should be expected to complete big projects and regular homework using only one night's worth of time over weekends.

### **Breaks**

Teachers may assign one night's worth of homework over a vacation. Likewise, when assigning long-term assignments that are due after break, teachers may count the entirety of a vacation as one single night's worth of work. For example, if a teacher would like students to have two weeks to work on a project that is due after winter break, the assignment should be due two school weeks (not including that vacation time) after it is assigned, counting the entirety of winter break as one single day. Breaks should be breaks – restful for students and teachers alike.

### **Encounter Weeks**

Encounter Week and its surrounding weekends are considered a homework grace period. Teachers therefore do not include the time between the school day before and after Encounter Week when they are allotting time (in terms of days or weeks) for an assignment to be completed. The exception to this is that day trip leaders may choose to assign nightly homework for that particular Encounter Week group and for the purposes of that Encounter Week experience. Students need to be able to immerse themselves fully in the spirit of Encounter Week.

## **GRADING**

The school operates on a semester system. Semester course grades are calculated using weighted averages of semesters (90%) and exams (10%) where appropriate, and year-long grades are calculated using the average of semester grades.

### **Grading Scale**

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

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- I – If extenuating circumstances arise during a semester and a student is unable to finish the required coursework on time, a grade of Incomplete (“I”) may be given by the teacher in consultation with administration. After the missing work is handed in, the teacher will calculate a grade for the semester. A new version of the Report Card will then be sent home.
- 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 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 a traditional percentage grade at the end of each semester and a narrative comment  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the way through each semester for each of their academic classes, as well as after each Encounter Week. Teachers describe the course content, identify the individual student’s strengths and growth areas, and add any appropriate notes. Interim Progress Reports, consisting of numerical averages, are sent out by the Registrar  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the way through each semester; in any class where a student has below a C average at this interim, a brief narrative comment written by the student’s teacher is included with the progress report.

### **End of the Semester**

All assignments, projects, and tests must be received by teachers prior to 5:00 p.m. on the last day of a semester. Extensions beyond that date may be given by the teacher after consultation with the administration and only in cases where illness or extraordinary circumstances precludes completion of the work.

### **Final Exams and Culminating Projects**

Final Exams are administered and/or Culminating Projects are completed in the following subjects during an exam period at the end of the first and second semesters: English, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science, and World Languages. Exams run for 2 hours for 9th-12th graders and 1½ hours for 8th graders in the spring exam periods. 6th and 7th graders do not take exams; 8th graders do

not take winter exams. Seniors participating in Senior Projects take their Spring Final Exams in late April immediately prior to departing for those Projects; those not doing Senior Projects take Spring Exams with the 8th-11th graders in early June. Faculty may choose to require culminating projects or presentations in lieu of final exams.

### **Calculation of Second Semester Senior Grades**

The second semester for seniors approved for a Senior Project is the approximately 12-week period prior to the beginning of their project. Seniors participating in Senior Projects take final exams and complete culminating assessments the week before beginning the Projects.

### **Honor Roll and High Honors**

Honor Rolls are determined at the close of each Semester. Any student who achieves a semester GPA of at least 87% and no course grade below 80% is placed on the Honor Roll. High Honors are awarded to students with a GPA of 93% or higher with no course grade below 85%. E-Week, Health, and PE grades are not calculated into the GPA and therefore are not considered part of Honor Roll designations.

### **Watch & Support Committee**

The Watch and Support Committee meets weekly to discuss current and ongoing concerns about individual students and to make plans to help them to find success at Vermont Commons. The team is composed of the Dean of Students and Assistant Head of School and, as needed, the school Learning Specialist. With this mix of roles, the committee is able to follow and address issues relating to social and behavioral needs, academic difficulties, emotional challenges, and learning differences.

The faculty communicate their observations to the Watch and Support Committee through email, grade level meetings, and informal conversation as concerns emerge. The Committee tracks individual students and seeks trends in the information to make recommendations to support students, and their families, when needed.

The Watch and Support Committee identifies students in academic difficulty and communicates with advisors, faculty, parents/guardians, coaches 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. The Watch and Support Committee and/or the advisor generally notify parents/guardians that their child is in need of extra support at this point.

Students who receive two or more grades below a 70% or one or more grades below a 60% at the end of a semester may be placed on Academic Probation. Probation tenets will be devised by the advisor, teachers, Watch and Support Committee, and appropriate administrators. Improvement in grades and satisfaction of the probation tenets should occur with a reasonable timeframe.

Possible tenets may include structured 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, and withholding of a student's contract for the following year, among other measures. Probation tenets will be re-evaluated at the end of each semester and Probation tenets may be altered upon re-evaluation.

Some student progress is tracked in the long-term, while others remain on the radar of the committee only briefly until the situation resolves. Weekly Committee meetings guarantee that each student is individually monitored and ensure follow-through with all parties, thus helping to assure each students' greatest success at VCS.

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

All current grades are reviewed weekly by 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 have averages in all of their classes at the time of audition and casting with grades above 60%, and no more than one grade below 70%.

## **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 years, 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. The Curriculum Committee reserves 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 years:

- 4 years of English
- 4 years of Science
- 4 years of Mathematics
- 4 years of World Language
- 4 years of Social Sciences
- 6 semester-long courses in the Arts (at least one in each of Visual and Performing Art)
- 11 Encounter Weeks
- 1 semester Health

Students who have accelerated in Math by successfully completing Calculus by the end of Junior year (or earlier) are not required to be enrolled for credit in a math course thereafter in order to graduate.



### **Additional requirement for students participating in senior project**

- Successfully complete the requirements of the senior project program, if the student chooses to participate.

### **Additional Information**

- 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.

### **Middle School Health & Physical Education**

- Each middle school core group has a 6-week segment in which they have a health class to discuss topics that are relevant to their age group.
- Physical Education classes meet twice a week. All Middle School students are enrolled in a PE course.

### **Add/Drop Period**

Schedule changes may be requested and must be completed by the second week of the course.

## **SENIOR INTERNSHIPS**

Seniors have the option of engaging during their fall semester in internships, in place of an Elective class, with local businesses, organizations, and professionals working in a broad array of fields, allowing each of our students to pursue one of their passions in a deep, meaningful, and challenging way over a long period of time. The Internships are also intended to enable the student to do work that both contributes to society and allows each student to develop personally and uniquely. The student is responsible for making connections and setting up the internship, in collaboration with their advisor. Students intern for at least three hours per week throughout the first semester. Students' faculty advisors oversee the ongoing internships over the course of the semester to assure their quality, as well as the accountability of the student.

## **ENCOUNTER WEEK PROGRAM**

Each student participates in three Encounter Weeks per year, one in late September/early October, one in early February, 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.

### **Encounter Week grades**

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 narrative comments for each student after each Encounter Week, based on participation, initiative, group cooperation, decorum on and off campus, and responsibility. As detailed above, students receive scores of 1-5 for Encounter Weeks, which appear on their transcripts but are not included in the GPA.

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 7.5 in grades 9-11 (and 12 if not participating in senior project)
- No less than 5 in grade 12 (if participating in senior project)

and they receive a score of no less than 1.5 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 (under the supervision of the Encounter Week Director) of a field-based immersion experience to be carried out independently. Four hours of independent work will be the equivalent of one day of an Encounter Week. Successful completion of this independent Encounter project will receive proportional points towards the year-end minimum.

### **Cost of Encounter Weeks**

The cost of Encounter Weeks is included in the price of tuition, with the exception of a small handful of Big Trip and Little 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 \$300-\$999 for a Little Trip and up to \$3000 for a Big Trip). Participation in Big Trips and Little Trips is voluntary and an application is involved, which takes into account each student's behavioral and academic standing in the school, seniority, and the number of Big/Little Trips the student has previously taken, if any, with preference to those who have not been on one before.

### **Financial Aid for Encounter Weeks**

Students already receiving Financial Aid for tuition are eligible to apply for further aid for Big or Little Trips through a FA fund specifically dedicated to supporting this purpose. When funds are available, this fund will allocate up to \$1000 one time in the course of a student's career at Vermont Commons to assist in paying for a Big or Little Trip. All fundraising for Big/Little Trips, whether undertaken by the school or specific Big or Little Trips groups, goes into this fund. Families wishing to request these funds should contact the Financial Aid Committee via the Business Manager.

### **Medication on Encounter Weeks**

In some circumstances, a student must bring prescription medications on an Encounter Week trip. If it's an emergency rescue medication (inhaler, epi-pen), the student should carry it with them at all times; if they have a back-up, the trip leaders should carry it. Ideally, controlled substances are not brought on school trips. If it is absolutely necessary for your child, please reach out to the trip leaders; they should carry this prescription medication for your child, but you must give them explicit permission to do so until such time as your child needs to take it; your child should self-administer the medication (as is the case with all medications, except in the case of a rescue medication such as an epi-pen, were your child unable to self-administer it). Non-controlled and over-the-counter medications, if brought, should be carried and--each time informing the trip leaders--self-administered by your child ; however, you should notify the trip leaders that your child is in possession of these medications before departure on the trip. In their first-aid kits, trip leaders have the standard over-the-counter meds we have at the front desk at school (Tums,

ibuprofen, etc.) and can provide them to your child if you granted permission on the Medical form in Blackbaud. If you need to update those permissions, please contact Katherine Bailey at [kbailey@vermontcommons.org](mailto:kbailey@vermontcommons.org). Trip leaders record date, time, amount, and recipient of any medication taken on the trip.

### **Evacuation or early return from Encounter Weeks**

Please keep in mind that if your child needs to be evacuated from or return early from the trip, you need to be available to travel to where the trip group is in order to pick them up and transport them home. Though this is a rare occasion, please remain in touch with some flexibility built into your schedule during Encounter Weeks.

## **CONTRACT HONORS**

Contract Honors is an opportunity for students in grades 10-12 to experience extra challenge. Students make a "contract" for additional studies and earn an Honors designation for that course on their transcript. Students taking a course for Honors complete the same coursework as their peers, plus additional studies. 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 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 25% of the way through the course to students who pass requirements as described by the teacher at the outset of the class
- Process of Selecting Students - The general benchmark is that students must have earned a 90% or higher in their prior year's coursework in the subject area to participate; for Science this requirement is for their prior semester's coursework. Exceptions may be granted by instructors on a case-by-case basis.
- 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. Additional 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 via a letter submitted to the student's advisor first for edits, and then to the Assistant Head of School one week before Honors contracts are due.

## **FLEXIBLE CURRICULUM**

### **Off-campus study**

Juniors and seniors may apply to the Department Chairs Committee to pursue limited off-campus study of a course in lieu of one of their academic courses at Vermont Commons. For a fall course, the application and approval process must be completed by the end of the previous school year. For a spring course, approval must be received by November 1. Replacements must be of equal rigor to Vermont Commons School coursework.

### **Application Steps (all must be completed sequentially)**

- The student proposes the idea to their advisor
- The student meets with the College Counselor to discuss implications for future endeavors
- The student meets with the Department Chair of the course that they are considering dropping (and, if a different discipline, with the Department Chair of the content area of the course they propose to add)
- The student writes a proposal to the Department Chairs committee to make a case for their off-campus coursework, this must be reviewed by the advisor prior to sending to the Assistant Head of School for distribution to the Department Chairs
  - The form that you must complete can be found at [this link](#).
- The student may be asked to come to a Department Chairs meeting to answer questions and to address concerns

### **Requirements**

- Students must have no grades below 60% and no more than one grade below 70% and be in good standing behaviorally.
- Students may ask to take only one class off-campus per semester.
- The replacement course must be graded and credit-bearing; the credit-awarding institution must provide transcripts verifying successful completion of coursework, as well as for the student's college applications. Vermont Commons records the course taken on the Vermont Commons Transcript but records no grade and awards no credit.
- The student must receive a passing grade in the course. Failure to do so means the student will not graduate and will not subsequently receive a Vermont Commons 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.
- Students must be enrolled in coursework for the entire year (a single semester university course does not count as two semesters of Vermont Commons coursework).

### **Notes**

- Credits earned elsewhere will count in lieu of Vermont Commons credits towards the Vermont Commons graduation requirement.
- The Vermont Commons schedule cannot be altered to accommodate college schedules. In general courses taken elsewhere will need to be scheduled outside of the Vermont Commons school day.

- Fees or tuition incurred in taking coursework elsewhere is the responsibility of the student's family; Vermont Commons does not offer rebates or reductions in tuition for courses taken elsewhere.

### **Independent study**

A student may pursue an independent study in a topic of their choice. This is not intended to replace an academic course, but rather serve as an additional opportunity to delve into a topic of student interest. The first step is for a student to discuss the idea with their advisor. Next, a student interested in an independent study needs to find a faculty mentor interested in guiding and overseeing the process. After that is in place, the student, in coordination with the faculty mentor, creates a proposal outlining the content (what will you study?), products (what will you create?), and method of sharing the learning (how will you let others know what you've learned?). The proposal goes before the Assistant Head of School for approval. The course will be listed as Independent Study: Topic on the transcript and will be graded on a P/F basis. This process needs to be completed by the end of May for a fall course or the end of November for a spring course.

## **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. The goal is to provide seniors with time to both reflect on their experiences at Vermont Commons School and to pursue an uninterrupted 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**

If a student is failing a semester-long or yearlong class by the announced April deadline, they will not be eligible for a senior project. This student will spend the remainder of the school year in regular classes with the goal of raising their 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 meet with their faculty advisor regularly (generally weekly) throughout the course of the Project, and the advisor will monitor and review the student's overall progress.
- **Community Mentor:** Students work alongside a community mentor for thirty hours per week. This individual signs a Letter of Agreement signifying willingness and ability to supervise the senior.
- **Senior Project Proposal:** In a 3-page written statement reviewed by their faculty advisor, students define their project and what they hope to achieve academically, personally, and/or artistically, describe their final Community Presentations, and outline how their time will be spent during the project. Students present proposals to a Senior Project Faculty Committee for feedback and/or approval. Proposals not approved by the stated deadline are ineligible for the Program.

- **Daily Log/Journal:** Students are required to keep a daily journal (paper or digital) to record and reflect on their experiences during the Senior Project. Daily Logs and other documentation are due to their Project Advisor one week before the Community Presentations.
- **Community Presentations:** During the month of June, students share their projects with the community. Presentations take a variety of forms, but should reflect on the experience as well as provide an interactive component. Community Presentations are followed by formal feedback from the faculty.
- **Reimbursement:** Students may not receive pay for work associated with the Senior Project.
- **Grades:** Projects are pass/fail, and are determined by the Senior Project Faculty Committees. 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 Community Presentation, may be given a "passing with honors" designation.

## **DIPLOMA CERTIFICATES OF CONCENTRATION**

Vermont Commons School offers Diploma Certificates of Concentration recognized with a graduate's diploma at their graduation ceremony. These allow our particularly dedicated students to dig deeply into their passions and build expertise in an area of interest with independent work at a high level of scholarship over a multi-year period.

### **Certificate Overview**

The student working towards a Diploma Certificate of Concentration will create a Committee of three VCS faculty; one committee member will be the main project Advisor. The student, with their Advisor and Committee, will create a Project (the work towards completion of the Certificate). At its core, the Certificate of Concentration recognizes independent work, so the responsibility is on the student to create the Project, with their Committee available to answer questions and provide general guidance. The student will present a Proposal to their Committee and the Assistant Head of School (AHoS) prior to the start of Project work. The culmination of the Project is two-fold: firstly, a public Presentation to the community (and possibly external stakeholders) and a Defense of the Project to the Committee and AHoS.

### **Project benchmarks and requirements**

#### **I. Project Proposal**

- A. The student will design a Project Proposal draft that outlines what they will learn/create over the course of their Project. This document will demonstrate a clear understanding of the steps/resources required to meet their goals. These resources could include outside expert mentors, coursework, readings, experimentation, etc. It is recommended that students have an expert mentor to support their learning.
- B. A Project cannot be counted towards other VCS work or programs (such as Senior Internship, Senior Project, classwork, etc.). The timing of the Project can (and probably will) overlap with other VCS programs. In those cases, it is up to the



student to ensure that the lines between the Certificate Project and other work are clearly drawn.

- C. While there is no set minimum hour requirement, a general rule of thumb is that a student will completely immerse themselves in the project and topic over multiple hundreds of hours.

## II. Project Committee and Advisor

- A. The student will share their Proposal draft with the faculty members they would like to consider serving on their Committee. Each faculty member will decide if, based on their availability and interests, they can participate in the Certificate Project Committee.
- B. One of the committee members will be the primary Advisor, who will work more closely with the student and AHoS throughout the process (especially in the early stages).
- C. The student (with input and guidance from their Committee) will create a final Proposal.

## III. Proposal Meeting

- A. The student, their Committee, and the AHoS will meet to review the Proposal; this meeting could happen as early as ninth grade but no later than October of the student's 11th grade year.
  - 1. Because of the open-ended nature of the Certificate of Concentration program, the role of the AHoS is to act as a 'gatekeeper,' ensuring that a wide variety of Projects are all held to a similarly high standard.
  - 2. The student should expect multiple rounds of revision before final approval.
- B. Upon approval of the Proposal, the student will begin work on their Project.
- C. This approval must be secured prior to the end of the first semester of the student's 11th grade year; however, we strongly encourage this process to begin as early as possible.

## IV. Project Completion

- A. Between the time of a Project Proposal approval and the Public Presentation, a student will complete the work of their project on their own time.
- B. As the student completes the project, they are required to keep a record of the learning and growth. This could be in the form of notes, videos, documents or other records. This should all be collated into an organized Google Drive digital archive to share with the Committee prior to the Defense.
- C. At the conclusion of the Presentation and Defense, the student will provide a collection of artifacts and writing that can be displayed in a permanent collection at the school.
- D. It is the student's responsibility to update their advisor of progress periodically.
- E. It is likely that unforeseen circumstances and opportunities may arise that could cause the student and their Committee to alter the course of the Project.
- F. If the Project is going to significantly depart from the approved Proposal, the Committee and Student will meet with the AHoS again to ensure that the Project still meets the program's expectations.

## V. Public Presentation

- A. When the student and their Committee agree that the Project's goals have been achieved, the student will publish a date for public Presentation of their work. Simultaneously, the student will schedule their follow-up Defense (see below).
- B. This date must be published prior to the beginning of the Senior Project window. The Presentation itself will happen anytime before the end of the High School Final Exam period. Earlier Presentations and Defenses will give a student more time for revision, if necessary.
- C. This hour-long Presentation will demonstrate what the student learned and accomplished over the course of their Project. Their audience is the general VCS community (students, faculty, and families) and any external community members, mentors, and possibly stakeholders the student and Committee elect to invite.
- D. If the Presentation is going to be off-site, the student and Committee must give careful consideration to making it accessible to the larger community.

#### VI. Committee Defense

- A. After the Presentation, the student will meet in a Defense of their work with only their Committee and the AHoS.
- B. The goal of this is twofold:
  1. To give the student the opportunity to experience a postsecondary education-style defense.
  2. To give the student the opportunity to demonstrate their newly acquired knowledge, skills, and experience at much greater depth than would be appropriate for the general VCS community.
- C. The Defense will happen after the Presentation, but before the end of the 8-11th grade Exam period.
- D. Upon successful completion of the Presentation and Defense, the committee will meet to ensure that the student has successfully completed all work to receive a Certificate of Concentration with their VCS diploma at Graduation.

### **Transcripts**

This program is based upon and loosely follows traditional doctoral dissertation research models. The rigorous independent Project can and typically does begin a year or two before the 12th grade year; however, the formal planning for the culminating public Presentation and closed Defense is recorded on the transcript only during the fall and spring of 12th grade year as coursework-in-progress, specifically denoted “Certificate of Concentration Research.” The transcript designation is the equivalent of dissertation research hours used by Ph.D.-granting institutions and operates in 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 members of the project Committee and the AHoS upon a live Defense of the project). So that colleges and universities to which the 12th grader is applying understand the exceptional rigor and advanced academic nature of this program, 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 their 12th grade year. As one of the highest honors a student can achieve, the awarding of a Certification of Concentration is announced during the conferring of the Vermont Commons School diploma at graduation.



## **Project Calendar**

1. Beginning of 9th grade through end of first semester, 11th grade:
  - a. Develop Project
  - b. Form Committee & Select Advisor
  - c. Create Proposal
  - d. Receive Approval from Committee and AHoS
2. From Proposal Approval through 12th grade: Project work completed
3. Prior to beginning of VCS Senior Project window:
  - a. Presentation date published
  - b. Defense scheduled
4. Prior to the end of the spring 8-11th grade Exam Period:
  - a. Presentation given
  - b. Defense passed

## **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 twice-yearly basis, in the spring and fall. Juniors, Seniors, and (in the spring semester) Sophomores 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. Students who are not inducted based on their initial application may reapply a year later, provided they continue to meet the GPA requirement.

## **III. STUDENT LIFE**

### **ADVISING PROGRAM**

#### **Individual Advisors**

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. Sixth grade students are advised by one of the sixth-grade teachers. Thereafter, students are assigned an advisor for the rest of their career at Vermont Commons. Students meet with their advisors on a regular basis on Thursdays during the time otherwise allotted to Morning Meeting. At fall Parent/Teacher Conferences, and anytime as needed, the advisor will meet with parents/guardians and students to discuss 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 the members of their grade, termed the "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. One advisor stays with the students from year to year through graduation while another advisor stays at the grade level. The core group also may plan a variety of 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.

## **SERVICE PROGRAM**

The mission of our service program is to go beyond the traditional disciplines and classroom walls and to connect learning to community engagement. The Service Program is a concrete manifestation of Vermont Commons School's deep commitment to place-based education, service learning, and community stewardship and provides a setting that encourages leadership and fosters group skills. Each Core Group partners with a local non-profit in order to provide three hours of community service on one morning of each month.

## **EXTRACURRICULAR SPORTS PROGRAM**

The primary mission of the athletic program is to foster collegiality, leadership, and personal growth. Student-athletes combine academic eligibility with 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 mission of the school. The following provides some basic tenets of the athletic program:

- Team sports are available to all students. No students will be cut from a team.
- Practices and games are considered extended campus events. School rules must be followed.
- Students follow attendance policies for both practices and games as specified by the coach.
- The academic eligibility policy for all extra-curricular activities applies to all sports events.

## **CLUBS**

The Clubs program provides time and space for students to explore extracurricular interests during the school day. Clubs may be started by any student or faculty member. To start a club, one needs to complete a simple form provided by the Dean of Students. A club must have more than one member.

## **MORNING MEETING**

Morning Meeting occurs after first period on most school days in the Commons Room, except on Thursdays when that time is given to advisory group meetings. The community members sit or stand in a circle so that all can see each other. Various student groups (Core Groups and Advisory Groups) usually run the meeting for a week at a time. Most meetings have time for community members to make announcements, celebrate achievements, and sing birthday songs. People making announcements are asked to remember that this is a shared time and to be concise so that others may have sufficient time to make their announcements. By arranging with the students running a given meeting, students and faculty will also read samples of writing, perform music, or give longer presentations. One meeting per week is often set aside for a Green-Gray competition.

## **LOST AND FOUND**

In the course of a school day, students sometimes misplace items. It happens! Most lost items are placed on the table just inside the entrance at the Lunchroom. After a few days there, they are often moved to the large gray storage bins in the corner of the lunchroom. More expensive or delicate items are often turned in at the front desk.

## **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 College Counselor 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 College Counselor 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 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 to 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 College Counselor submits an official letter of recommendation on behalf of 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 resumé to highlight their personal, academic and extracurricular activities; Naviance has a tool that can be used to help with this.

### **Standardized Testing**

Students chart their standardized testing course while working closely with the College Counselor. They also take into consideration the specific admission standards of the institutions to which they will apply. In October, Sophomores take the pre-ACT and Juniors take the PSAT. 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). Students should talk to the college counselor about an appropriate course of testing for their college application plan.

Please note: Vermont Commons requires that each student request their 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. We only

process 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 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. College Guidance 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. If the transcript is sent to us, we will include the course title of successfully completed courses at credit-bearing institutions on our transcript. Upon graduating from Vermont Commons School, the school sends a copy of our final transcript to the enrolling institution for each graduating senior, marking their official graduation from the school.

### **Reporting disciplinary information to colleges and universities**

As an institution grounded in honesty and respect, we expect 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, 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, 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 (grade level) has representatives who serve on the Senate. The student body elects these students during a core group meeting early in the school year. Students who wish to serve in 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 votes are counted by the Core Group advisors. 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 Dean of Students, a formal opportunity for students to voice any of the suggestions and/or concerns arising from the student body. The student body also elects a President of the Student Body in the spring, shortly before spring break. The President of the Student Body has several additional responsibilities:

- I. Student Body President and Board of Trustees involvement
  - A. Invited to Board meetings as a guest
  - B. Serve on Board Committees
- II. Other responsibilities
  - A. Plan, oversee and lead Student Senate meetings
  - B. Serve as the voice of the student body when one is sought for decisions
  - C. Represent the school at school fairs, Open Houses, and other events
  - D. Make occasional presentations to the faculty at faculty meetings
  - E. Serve on an as-needed basis on various school committees

## **SENIOR PRIVILEGES**

Senior privileges may be granted to the seniors with the understanding that they continue to earn the respect of the Vermont Commons School community and maintain their roles as community leaders. Senior privileges begin once the Dean of Students has notified the parents/guardians of the seniors and has met with the senior class, which typically happens in the third week of classes.

- Seniors may arrive at school at 9:25 a.m. for morning meeting if they have a study hall 1st period.
- Seniors may leave campus during free periods or lunch provided they return for the beginning of their classes, activities, or other responsibilities. Seniors may miss Community Care & Cleaning (CCC) if they have study halls BOTH 4th and 5th blocks on Monday/Wednesday/Friday or 3rd and 4th blocks on Tuesday/Thursday provided they do their chore before they depart.
- Seniors may leave school at 2:30 if they have a study hall scheduled last period (including Fridays).
- Seniors may not leave for lunch if they have a meeting.
- Seniors must sign out when leaving and sign in when returning at the front desk.
- Senior Privileges may be withdrawn at any time for failure to abide by these guidelines or for other behavioral or academic issues.

## **IV. COMMUNITY STANDARDS**

### **ATTENDANCE AND ABSENCES**

The school day begins at 8:30 AM and ends at 3:30 PM. Parents should notify the front desk ([attendance@vermontcommons.org](mailto:attendance@vermontcommons.org)) 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 or email [attendance@vermontcommons.org](mailto:attendance@vermontcommons.org). Parents should leave a message in the “General Mailbox” if the receptionist does not answer in person. A student must sign in and out at the Front Office whenever they arrive late, leave school during the day, or return to school after leaving.

Tardiness to any class is disrespectful and disruptive to the learning process. If a student accumulates 5 tardies, an appropriate response is coordinated by the Dean of Students. If a student accumulates 10 tardies, the Dean of Students will coordinate a meeting with the student and parents to determine a further 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, which includes Encounter Weeks. 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 requested). Please schedule routine medical appointments during non-class times whenever possible. In the case of religious holidays, 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.

If an Excused Absence is granted, students should communicate directly with their teachers to inform them of their plans and arrange to complete all of the coursework, tests, etc. in all of their classes on a schedule determined by their teachers. Teachers will, to the extent possible, make reasonable arrangements to support the student as they plan for and catch up from anticipated absences, but the responsibility for staying current in the class is ultimately the student’s. Upon their return to school, students should be prepared to present all missed assignments to faculty.

## **UNPLANNED ABSENCES**

What to do when you are out sick for multiple days:

- Rest and get better. At first, let school go so your body can heal.
- Check Blackbaud for each of your classes, once you are able to focus and do school work.
- Reach out to a classmate to clarify anything that doesn't make sense.
- Make a master list of everything you are missing.
- Email teachers individually and (politely!) let them know what you plan to do based on what you saw on Blackbaud and what you heard from a classmate. Ask what else you can do to stay current in class. Also ask for clarification on anything that does not make sense.
- Once you are back at school, ask the teacher in person to make sure you have all materials that were handed out while you were out.
- Make a copy of notes from a classmate when you return.
- Meet with your advisor to make a plan for how to pace the work so you don't get overwhelmed.
- Check in with your advisor to modify your plan as needed, and let them know once you're all set.



- Remember: you have as many school days as you missed to make up your missed work. School is certainly important and you have a responsibility to yourself to get caught up, but your health comes first!

In cases of illness or extended absence, extensions of homework deadlines are sometimes warranted. This accommodation should be discussed and agreed upon as soon as possible after the student's return. The typical extension is equal to the number of days absent, up to a maximum of no more than two weeks time. 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 that the student take a medical leave of absence from school. Medical leaves are treated as excused absences, and a doctor's note is required. 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 half semester (over seven weeks) 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 front desk 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 half-semester, or a cumulative total of 20 days over the course of the academic year, places in jeopardy their 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 Assistant Head of School, the Dean of Students, and the student's advisor to determine an appropriate course of action.

## **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:

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- The program and courses studied away/abroad, and upon return, must be approved by the Department Chairs Committee by the end of the school year prior to the year during which the student would study abroad. 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.
- 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.
- 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.

## **STUDY HALL & FREE PERIODS**

Middle school students attend structured 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. High school students have free periods when they do not have classes. If a student is struggling academically, the Watch and Support Committee may require them to attend study halls in a teacher's office.

Students not required to be in faculty-monitored study halls must remain on campus, except for seniors with senior privileges. High school students with first period study halls must sign in at the front desk by 8:30am.

## **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 Lunchroom 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 Lunchroom except as permitted by classroom teachers. The intent of lunch as part of our time together in community is that it be screen-free; the use of computers and all other internet-capable devices is discouraged at this time.

Deliveries of food and beverages during the school day are not permitted from services such as DoorDash, Uber Eats, and Postmates, or directly from restaurants (i.e. don't order yourself a pizza). Parents/guardians may deliver food during the day in case a lunch or snacks are needed.



## **MEDICATION**

In some circumstances, a student needs to have medication at school. If it's an emergency rescue medication (inhaler, epi-pen), the student should carry it with them at all times; if they have a back-up, it should be left at the front desk in a plastic bag clearly labeled with their name.

Ideally, controlled substances are not brought to school. If a controlled substance is absolutely necessary for your child, please reach out to the dean of students or the receptionist. The controlled substance should be kept at the front desk and your child should self-administer the medication (as is the case with all medications, except in the case of a rescue medication such as an epi-pen, were your child unable to self-administer it). If a medication is not a controlled substance then it does not have to be kept at the front desk.

## **PICKUP AND SCHOOL CLOSING**

Faculty remain on campus until 4 p.m. each day so that students may meet with them for support with their classes; however, the school does not provide formal, organized after school supervision. Unless students are involved in a faculty-sponsored after school activity, students not transporting themselves should generally be picked up by 4:00 p.m. by their parents/guardians. By 4:30 p.m. each day, all students must, without exception, be picked up or depart campus; at this time, the school building is locked and the school no longer offers adult supervision nor adult presence on campus.

## **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 their valued place in the community.

When incidents occur, the following protocol is generally followed:

- The incident is reported to the Dean of Students
- The Dean of Students reviews the incident with the faculty member, student(s) involved, and others, if appropriate.
- The Dean of Students may meet with parents, the student’s advisor, or other community members to review and discuss the incident.
- The Dean of Students makes 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 a conflict resolution process, 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 front desk; they will locate the Dean of Students.

When this occurs, the Dean of Students 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 may 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.

### **Restraint and Seclusion**

Vermont Commons School does not practice restraint or seclusion of students.

## **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 firearms or other 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.

## **STANCE ON NONVIOLENCE**

Violence is antithetical to the very core of Vermont Common School's being. Physical violence of any kind is unacceptable in our community by any of its members and will result in appropriate disciplinary action. Fighting is grounds for immediate expulsion.

## **HAZING, HARASSMENT, AND BULLYING POLICY**

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. Hazing, harassment, and bullying are forms of discrimination as well as dangerous and disrespectful behaviors that have no place at Vermont Commons School, and accordingly it is the policy of Vermont Commons School to oppose and prohibit, without qualification, hazing and bullying; furthermore the School opposes and prohibits without qualification harassment based on race, color, age, religion or belief (creed), national origin, gender or sexual identity, marital status, or disability. Any hazing, harassment, or bullying of a student by a member of our school community is a violation of this policy.

Vermont Commons School will review any complaints of hazing, harassment, or bullying, formal or informal, verbal or written. Hazing, harassment, and bullying may involve a range of misconduct, and if the school determines that the content of a complaint rises to the level of hazing, harassment, or bullying, the school will investigate the complaint and will discipline or take appropriate action against any member of the school community who is found to have violated this policy.

**Hazing** is defined as any act committed by a person, whether individually or in concert with others, against a student in connection with being initiated into, affiliating with, participating in, holding office in, or maintaining membership in any student organization affiliated with Vermont Commons School and that is intended to have the effect of—or should reasonably be expected to have the effect of—humiliating, intimidating, or demeaning the student or endangering the mental or physical health of the student. Hazing also includes soliciting, directing, aiding, or otherwise participating actively or passively in these acts. Hazing may occur on or off the campus of Vermont Commons School.

**Harassment** is defined as an incident or incidents of verbal, written, visual, or physical conduct, including any incident conducted by electronic means, based on or motivated by a student's or a student's family member's actual or perceived race, creed, color, national origin, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability that has the purpose or effect of objectively and substantially undermining and detracting from or interfering with a student's educational performance or access to school resources or creating an objectively intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment. Harassment constitutes 1) sexual harassment, which means conduct that includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal, written, visual, or physical conduct of a sexual nature when submission to that conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of a student's education and/or submission to or rejection of such conduct by a student is used as a component of the basis for decisions affecting that student; 2) racial harassment, which means conduct directed at the characteristics of a student's or a student's family member's actual or perceived race or color, and includes the use of epithets, stereotypes, racial slurs, comments, insults, derogatory remarks, gestures, threats, graffiti, display, or circulation of written or visual material, and taunts on manner of speech and negative references to racial customs; or 3) harassment of members of other protected categories, which means conduct directed at the characteristics of a student's or a student's family member's actual or perceived

creed, national origin, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability and includes the use of epithets, stereotypes, slurs, comments, insults, derogatory remarks, gestures, threats, graffiti, display, or circulation of written or visual material, taunts on manner of speech, and negative references to customs related to any of these protected categories.

Bullying is defined as any overt act or combination of acts, including an act conducted by electronic means, directed against a student by another student or group of students and that is repeated over time, is intended to ridicule, humiliate, or intimidate the student, and occurs before, during, or after the school day on school property, on a school vehicle, or at a school-sponsored activity *or* does not occur during the school day on school property, on a school vehicle, or at a school-sponsored activity but can be shown to pose a clear and substantial interference with another student's right to access educational programs.

### **Reporting to the School**

If hazing, harassment, or bullying may have occurred at Vermont Commons School,

- a. Students may report personally or anonymously to teachers and school administrators such acts. Vermont Commons School has established the following methods for such reporting:
  - Anonymous reports can be made in writing to the Dean of Students' mailbox behind the front desk.
  - Direct reports can be made to the Dean of Students in person, via email ([tharger@vermontcommons.org](mailto:tharger@vermontcommons.org)), via phone (802.865.8084) or in writing either to the Dean of Students mailbox behind the front desk or by US Mail to Dean of Students, Vermont Commons School, 75 Green Mountain Drive, S. Burlington, VT 05403.
- b. Parents/Guardians of students may report suspected hazing, harassment, or bullying using the same methods described for students in section "a" above.
- c. Teachers or other school staff who witness conduct that they reasonably believe might constitute hazing, harassment or bullying should take reasonable action to stop the conduct and prevent its recurrence and should immediately report it to the Dean of Students. If the Dean of Students is a person alleged to be engaged in the conduct complained of, the incident should be immediately reported to the Assistant Head of School.
- d. The Dean of Students will accept and review all reports of hazing, harassment, or bullying, including anonymous reports. If after the Dean of Students' review (in consultation with the Assistant Head of School), a report appears to warrant further investigation, the Dean of Students or the Assistant Head of School shall promptly undertake an investigation, which shall be reviewed upon completion by the non-primary investigator.

### **Notifying Parents/Guardians**

- e. The Dean of Students or Assistant Head of School will notify the parents or guardians of a student who *commits* a verified act of hazing, harassment, or bullying that it has occurred, what the school's response is, and what consequences may result from further such acts. When the school administrator contacts the parents/guardians about the school's response to a hazing, harassment, or bullying incident, they 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 who committed the hazing, harassment, or bullying.

- f. The Dean of Students or Assistant Head of School will notify the parents or guardians of a student who is a *target* of hazing, harassment, or bullying of the action taken to prevent any further acts of bullying. When the school administrator contacts the parents/guardians about the school's response to a hazing, harassment, or bullying incident, they may discuss information about their investigation and disciplinary 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 hazing, harassment, or bullying.

## **PROCEDURES IN CASES OF HAZING, HARASSMENT, OR BULLYING**

1. Upon receiving a report that hazing, harassment or bullying may have occurred the Dean of Students or the Assistant Head of School will
  - a. Create a confidential file for retaining information from the report and any new information that arises.
  - b. Seek clarifying information from the reporter, if available and/or necessary, and determine if the reported behavior/s meet the definition of hazing, harassment, or bullying. Depending on the circumstances reported, this may take as little as a part of a day or as long as a week or more.
  - c. If the Dean of Students or the Assistant Head of School determines that the reported behavior is likely to meet the definition of hazing, harassment, or bullying, the Dean of Students or the Assistant Head of School will inform the Head of School that a report that has a reasonable chance of meeting these criteria has been received and that the Dean of Students or the Assistant Head of School will be proceeding with an investigation.
  - d. At this time, the Dean of Students or the Assistant Head of School will contact the the complainant/s, the accused individual/s, and their parents/guardians, informing them that a report has been made and that an investigation will be undertaken by the school and directing them to the school's policy and procedures regarding hazing, harassment and bullying in the *Guide for Students and Families* on the school's website.
2. Upon initiation of an investigation,
  - a. The Dean of Students or the Assistant Head of School will contact the the complainant/s, the accused individual/s, and their parents/guardians, informing them that a report has been made and that an investigation will be undertaken by the school and directing them to the school's policy and procedures regarding hazing, harassment and bullying in the *Guide for Students and Families* on the school's website.
  - b. The students and parents/guardians will also be reminded that retaliation is prohibited; everyone involved is entitled to confidentiality; and that they will be informed of the outcome of the investigation and the determination of the school regarding the report.
  - c. As with all disciplinary matters at Vermont Commons School, both the determination and details of disciplinary response are confidential and will not be reported to other students or parents/guardians, nor to the Faculty of the school.
3. The investigation:

- a. If a complaint is determined by the Dean of Students or the Assistant Head of School to meet the criteria of hazing, harassment, or bullying, the Dean of Students or the Assistant Head of School will start a formal investigation of the allegations typically within two school days. The Dean of Students or the Assistant Head of School will investigate the complaint.
  - b. It may be appropriate for the school to take interim measures during the investigation of a complaint. The school may decide to place the students immediately in separate classes or activities or, given the school's small size, pause participation in such activities during the investigation. In all cases, the school will make every effort to prevent disclosure of the names of everyone involved—the complainant, the witnesses, and the accused—except to the extent necessary to carry out the investigation.
  - c. The Dean of Students or the Assistant Head of School, when determining whether the reported behavior occurred and constitutes a violation of this policy, may also consider (among other factors) the surrounding circumstances, the nature of the behavior, past incidents or past or continuing patterns of behavior, the relationships between the students involved, and the context in which the reported incidents occurred. The reporter and the accused student will be provided the opportunity to present witnesses and other evidence during the investigation. The school may also consider the impact of relevant off-campus conduct on the school environment, in which direct harm to the welfare or learning of the reporting student or other students can be demonstrated.
4. No later than two weeks (ten school days) from the beginning of the investigation, the investigator will conclude their investigation, the non-primary investigator will conduct their review, and, in consultation with the non-primary investigator, the investigator will determine whether or not a violation of the school's hazing, harassment, and bullying policy has occurred. The Dean of Students will then determine the school's response to the violation.
  5. The Dean of Students will prepare a brief written report, including a statement of the findings of the investigator as to whether the allegations of hazing, harassment, or bullying have been substantiated and the school's response to that violation of school policy. The report references student conduct and is therefore strictly confidential.
  6. Within one school day of the conclusion of the investigation and production of the report, the Dean of Students will:
    - a. Notify the reporter and the accused and their parents/guardians
      - i. That the investigation has been completed
      - ii. Whether or not the investigation determined that a policy violation occurred (and whether it was harassment, hazing or bullying)
      - iii. If a violation occurred, inform the student(s) who violated the policy and their parents/guardians what the school's response is, including any disciplinary action
      - iv. Remind everyone that confidentiality means there will be no disclosure of any information or details regarding discipline imposed as a result of the investigation, other than to the student(s) being disciplined and their parents/guardians.



- v. Notify the reporter and/or their parents/guardians, if relevant, that they may request an internal review by the Head of School (to be made to the Head of School within one month of the determination by the Dean of Students that hazing, harassment, or bullying occurred) regarding the determination of if a violation occurred, or if a violation was found to have occurred but the reporter and/or their parents/guardians have found the school's response unsuccessful in correcting the problem. The Head of School may appoint an independent designee to carry out this review, for which purpose the independent reviewer shall be considered an agent of the school for the purpose of being able to review confidential student records. The review shall consist of an interview of the reporter, accused, other students involved, and school employees, and a review of the written materials from the Dean of Student's confidential file. The review will be completed within approximately two weeks of the request, and the Head of School will communicate its findings to the party requesting the review and may choose to take subsequent action.
  - vi. Notify the student(s) found to have violated the policy, and their parents/guardians, that they may request an internal review by the Head of School (to be made within one week of the determination by the Dean of Students that hazing, harassment, or bullying occurred). The standard of review by the Head of School shall be whether the finding that an act(s) of hazing, harassment, or bullying has been committed constitutes an abuse of discretion by the investigator (Dean of Students or Assistant Head of School). The Head of School may appoint an independent designee to carry out this review, for which purpose the independent reviewer shall be considered an agent of the school for the purpose of being able to review confidential student records. The review shall consist of an interview of the reporter, accused, other students involved, and school employees, and a review of the written materials from the Dean of Student's confidential file. The review will be completed within approximately two weeks of the request, and the Head of School will 1) communicate the review's findings to the party requesting the review and 2) may choose to take subsequent action.
7. In cases where the investigation has identified other conduct that may constitute a violation of other school disciplinary policies or codes of conduct, the Dean of Students will determine if action in accordance with other relevant school policies or codes of conduct is called for and act accordingly. Behaviors that do not rise to the level of hazing, harassment, or bullying, as defined above, still may be subject to intervention and discipline by the school.
  8. Students, their parents/guardians, and those witnesses involved in the school's investigation should report any subsequent problems or address any follow-up inquiries regarding new incidents or any retaliation to the Dean of Students or Assistant Head of School.
  9. Any student or parent/guardian who knowingly makes false accusations regarding hazing, harassment, or bullying, may be subject to disciplinary action. No adverse action will be taken against a person for reporting a complaint of hazing, harassment or bullying when the person has a good faith belief that hazing, harassment or bullying occurred or is occurring.

## **DRUG AND ALCOHOL POLICY**

To model and instill healthy behaviors and to allow for healthy neural development, 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. Possession, use, or presence under the influence of marijuana – in any form – is also prohibited on campus or at any school activity.

## **SMOKE-FREE SCHOOL POLICY**

To model and instill healthy behaviors and to allow for healthy neural development, Vermont Commons is a smoke-free and tobacco free campus. Smoking and tobacco use is forbidden at all school events, on- or off-campus. Per Vermont State Statute, smoking and smokeless tobacco products of any kind are prohibited on the grounds of schools. This extends to juuling and vaping, including non-tobacco inhalants.

## **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 the 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.

## **PET-FREE BUILDING POLICY**

Vermont Commons School building is a pet-free building. If you need to bring a pet to campus, please keep them outside and under control at all times and 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's 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. Remember that pedestrians have the right of way.
- Per Vermont State Statute, texting while driving is illegal. It is also unsafe and dangerous to the driver, the occupants of the driver's car, and those nearby.
- 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.

## **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 bus will be revoked.
- There will be no loud noises, yelling, or distracting conversations on the bus.
- 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 bus riding

privileges, in which case parents/guardians would be responsible for the transportation of their child to school events and field trips.

## **CRISIS MANAGEMENT COMMANDS**

- **Clear the Halls:** Go to the closest room supervised by an adult. Close and lock the door. Students and staff remain away from doors and windows. Use the 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 the 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 the Parent/Guardian Alert System.
- **Run/Hide/Fight:** In response to an active threat in the building, students will seek to evade, hide from and impede, or actively resist the threat according to the specific circumstances.

Students receive training and drill on these protocols during the school year. 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.

## **STUDENT CELL PHONE POLICY**

Our community is strongest when all of the community members are present and focused on in-person interactions. Significant and increasing evidence points to the addictive quality of cell phones and the increase in depression and other negative outcomes as a result of their use.

We are a phone-free community from when students arrive in the morning until the end of the school day. We encourage all students to leave their phones and smart watches at home.

Students in grades 6-8 are required either to leave their cell phones and smart watches at home or to turn them in at the front desk upon arriving at school, where they will be kept safely until the end of the day. Students in grades 9-12 are encouraged to leave phones and smart watches in their lockers or backpacks. Teachers may collect phones during a test or exam.

If a phone or smart watch is seen or heard, the student will be asked to turn off the device and give it to the teacher. The faculty member will turn the device over to the front desk and the dean of students will be notified. At the end of the student's school day, they may reclaim the device when they leave for the day. Violations of this policy will proceed according to the following schedule:

Second occurrence: the student's parent/guardian will be notified that their device was confiscated for a second time

Third occurrence: the student's parent/guardian will be notified that their device was confiscated for a third time; if the student is a high school student, they will have to turn their device in at the front desk for a week

Fourth occurrence: the student and their parent/guardian will schedule a conference with the Dean of Students

Earbuds and headphones are only permitted to be used under the direction of a teacher or during a free period. They may not be used during class when a teacher has not indicated their use or during community gatherings such as Morning Meeting and Common Times. Use at other times will be treated in the same way as a phone.

If other devices cause distractions, then the dean of students will consult with the faculty members and discuss with the student and their parents/guardians to ensure that the school day can proceed with a minimum of distraction for the student and for the rest of the class.

If parents/guardians need to get a message to their child during the school day, they should call the front desk at 802-865-8084 or email [frontdesk@vermontcommons.org](mailto:frontdesk@vermontcommons.org) and the person at the front desk will pass any necessary messages along. Likewise, if a student needs to contact their parent/guardian during the school day, they can call on the phone located near the front desk.

Exceptions to this policy may be made on a case-by-case basis and will usually involve a documented need for educational or medical use.

## **COMPUTER USE POLICY**

### **General Purpose**

Vermont Commons School makes available computing and network resources that may be used by 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 require 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 may under no circumstance 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 TECHNOLOGY: Blackbaud**

Vermont Commons School provides a variety of ways to access information and faculty, including the school website, Google calendars, and Blackbaud. 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 Blackbaud, 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. Blackbaud 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, and homework, as well as other useful school information is available. To access Blackbaud:

- Go to [vermontcommons.myschoolapp.com](http://vermontcommons.myschoolapp.com)
- Login with your full email address as your username/BBID

Typically, one parent/guardian will have already created an account to complete the application and enrollment process. If you have not yet created an account, reach out to [kbailey@vermontcommons.org](mailto:kbailey@vermontcommons.org). An email will be sent to you from [vermontcommons@myschoolapp.com](mailto:vermontcommons@myschoolapp.com) with the subject: Connect to Vermont Commons School. Click the blue "Accept Invitation" button in the email to create your account.

Please contact the Registrar, Katherine Bailey, with questions.

## **V. MOSTLY FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS GUIDE TO GIVING**

Every year, the Vermont Commons School community shows remarkable generosity and commitment to the financial health and overall vitality of the school. Philanthropy makes it possible for students to go paddling in the Adirondacks, experience a Model United Nations conference, and travel to compete in sports. It enables students from a range of backgrounds to attend VCS, contributing to the diversity and dynamism of our school. It lets our faculty participate

in transformational professional development and bring the latest in pedagogy back to VCS. And it has allowed us to expand and upgrade our campus so that our facilities are a reflection of the amazing learning and teaching that happen here.

### **The Annual Fund**

We believe—and best practice dictates—that relying on tuition alone to fund a school’s operations is not sustainable or equitable. To provide the educational experiences that we are known for and to keep a VCS education within reach of more students, we ask every family to contribute to the Annual Fund every year, to the degree that they are able. The Annual Fund is a critical component of our yearly operating budget.

[You can support the Annual Fund any time by giving online here.](#)

### **The Campaign for Vermont Commons: Outdoor Education Center**

The Campaign for Vermont Commons is creating the infrastructure to provide the things that all children need—physical space to move and quiet places, inside and out. Through the Campaign, we are growing our campus, including an Outdoor Education Center where our students can gain informed appreciation of the relationship between themselves and the natural world. Our focus now is to complete the OEC so that our community can take advantage of this extraordinary resource and new facilities as soon as possible. We hope you will help make it happen.

[You can help VCS reach its goal of finishing the OEC by giving online here.](#)

### **Monthly and Recurring Donations**

When you choose a recurring donation to VCS, you’re supporting our students and faculty regularly, at whatever interval you choose! Want to make a gift every month? Quarterly? Annually? When you make a gift online, the choice is yours.

### **Planned Giving**

Planned gifts are made now and distributed in the future. By including Vermont Commons in your estate plans, you are helping to ensure that future students can receive the kind of impactful education that VCS is known for. We encourage anyone who is thinking of making a bequest or other planned gift to make the school aware of your plans.

### **Gifts In Kind**

We are often able to accept gifts of goods or services as charitable donations. Some examples of gifts in kind include furniture, technology, landscaping services, and art supplies. While we are unable to accept every gift, please reach out if you have something in mind.

### **How to Give**

There are many easy ways to donate! In addition to [making a gift online](#), you can donate...

- By check made payable to Vermont Commons School. Please note in the memo where we should direct your gift. Checks may be dropped off or mailed to:  
Vermont Commons School  
75 Green Mountain Dr.  
S. Burlington, VT 05401

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- By gifting stocks, annuities, or other appreciated securities
- By bank transfer

If you have any questions about how to best support VCS, please reach out to Sharon Panitch, Director of Development, at [spanitch@vermontcommons.org](mailto:spanitch@vermontcommons.org) or call 802-865-8084.

## **GUIDE TO GETTING INVOLVED**

From serving on the board to serving burgers at Field Day, there are many ways to get involved and support VCS with your time and talents.

### **The Vermont Commons School Community Association (VCSCA)**

The VCSCA is an informal group of parents/guardians who help pull off some of the year's most anticipated events, including Field Day, Arts Night, and the fall bonfire. Monthly planning meetings are open to the entire community, so if you have ideas or want to be more deeply involved, that's a great place to start!

If planning isn't your jam, there are events and volunteer opportunities throughout the year that you can pick and choose from. Whether you want to come to one of the monthly community coffees, help set up the Faculty Appreciation Luncheon, or just find out more, the VCSCA welcomes your involvement and your questions. For more information, email [vcsc@vermontcommons.org](mailto:vcsc@vermontcommons.org).

### **Admissions Events**

VCS hosts many Admissions events throughout the year to introduce prospective families to Vermont Commons School, and it is our parent/guardian volunteers who ensure the success of these important events! Sharing your VCS experiences with others is the best way to spread the word about our school. Some events take place in the evening or on the weekend, and others happen during the school day. If you have 1-2 hours to help create a welcoming environment and share your enthusiasm for VCS, please contact Kat Nelson at [knelson@vermontcommons.org](mailto:knelson@vermontcommons.org).

### **Student Life**

The collective expertise of the VCS community is vast and represents an opportunity to share knowledge and experience beyond the classroom. From giving short presentations to offering internships, there are many opportunities to enhance the learning of VCS students. To get involved, email Dean of Students Tim Harger at [tharger@vermontcommons.org](mailto:tharger@vermontcommons.org).

### **Board of Trustees**

The VCS Board of Trustees is a group of volunteers that works strategically to advance the mission and vision of the school through organizational integrity, financial health, sound policy, and overall school vibrancy. Our current Board consists of 17 members who are current and former parents, alums, and friends of VCS. The Board meets quarterly, with the bulk of its work being done by committees in the interim. Some of the Board's responsibilities include:

- Ensuring the long-term financial health of the school
- Creating and helping to carry out a strategic plan based on the school's mission and vision
- Establishing and ensuring the success of campus development projects
- Setting tuition, approving the annual budget, and maintaining best financial practices



## **Committees**

The VCS Board of Trustees has both standing and ad hoc committees where a vast majority of the Board's work happens. Standing committees include Finance, Governance, Facilities, and Development. There is also an ad hoc Long Term Enrollment Committee comprised of staff, board, and community members. Many committees are looking to welcome non-trustee members to lend their skills and expertise on projects. Time commitments vary.

If you are interested in volunteering or learning more about the work of the Board or specific committees, please reach out to Board Chair Bethany Gibbs at [bgibbs@vermontcommons.org](mailto:bgibbs@vermontcommons.org).

## **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 February. Late applications for aid 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 circumstances 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 a maximum of 16.5% of its operating budget in financial aid awards to families who demonstrate need. For more information or for help in managing financial aid needs and awards, contact the Business Director, Linda Bursell.

## **TUITION INSURANCE**

Families are responsible for complete payment of tuition regardless of circumstances or experience. 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**

The school directory is available anytime on Blackbaud. To access it, follow these steps:

- Log in to Blackbaud at [vermontcommons.myschoolapp.com](https://vermontcommons.myschoolapp.com)
- Hover over the "Directories" icon in the menu bar near the top of your screen and select either Parents or Faculty & Staff
- If you select Parents, you can enter a name in the search bar or use the filters on the right side of the screen to display by Home City or Child Grade Level. Click the "Show More" button for additional options in those categories.
- Once Parent info is displayed, you can click Show Additional Information if available to display phone numbers, and the Options drop-down menu will let you either view their Contact Card or add them to your Contacts.

- If you select Faculty, you will have to enter either a first or last name in the search bar for their information to pop up.

## **VI. VERMONT AGENCY OF EDUCATION STATEMENTS**

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

- (c) Recognized independent schools. Upon filing an enrollment notice, a recognized independent school may provide elementary or secondary education in Vermont. The enrollment notice shall be on a form provided by the Secretary and shall be filed with the Secretary no earlier than three months before the beginning of the school year for the public schools in the town in which the applicant proposes to locate.
  - (1) The enrollment notice shall contain the following information and assurances:
    - (A) a statement that the school will be in session an amount of time substantially equivalent to that required for public schools;
    - (B) a detailed description or outline of the minimum course of study for each grade level the school offers and how the annual assessment of each student will be performed; and
    - (C) assurances that:
      - (i) the school will prepare and maintain attendance records for each student enrolled or regularly attending classes;
      - (ii) at least once each year, the school will assess each student's progress, and will maintain records of that assessment, and present the result of that assessment to each student's parent or guardian;
      - (iii) the school's educational program will include the minimum course of study set forth in section 906 of this title;
      - (iv) the school will have teachers and materials sufficient to carry out the school's educational program; and
      - (v) the school will meet such State and federal laws and regulations concerning its physical facilities and health and safety matters as are applicable to recognized independent schools.
  - (2) If the Secretary has information that creates significant doubt about whether the school would be able to meet the requirements set forth in this subsection (c), the Secretary may call a hearing. At the hearing, the school shall establish that it can meet the requirements for recognized independent schools. Failure to do so shall result in a finding by the Secretary that the school must take specified action to come into compliance within a specified time frame or the children enrolled must attend another recognized independent school, a public school, an approved independent school, or a home study program, or be declared truant unless absent with legal excuse.
  - (3) A recognized independent school shall provide to each student's parent or guardian a copy of its currently filed statement of objectives and a copy of this section. The copy shall be provided when the student enrolls or before September 1,



whichever comes later. Failure to comply with this subsection may create a permissible inference of false advertising in violation of 13 V.S.A. § 2005.

- (4) A recognized independent school shall renew its enrollment notice annually. An independent school shall be recognized for a period not to exceed five years by the Secretary without need for filing an annual enrollment notice if:
  - (A) it is recognized by an organization approved by the State Board for the purpose of recognizing such school; or
  - (B) it is accredited by a private, state, or regional agency approved by the State Board for accrediting purposes; provided, however, nothing in this subdivision (4) shall be construed to prohibit the Secretary from initiating a hearing under this subsection (c).
- (5) If the Secretary has information that creates significant doubt about whether the school, once in operation, is meeting the requirements for recognized independent schools, the Secretary may call a hearing. At the hearing, the school shall establish that it has met the requirements for recognized independent schools. Failure to do so shall result in a finding by the Secretary that:
  - (A) the school may not be in operation for the remainder of the school year and that the children are truant unless absent with legal excuse or enrolled in a public school, an independent school, another recognized independent school, or a home study program; or
  - (B) the school must take specified action to come into compliance within a specified time frame or the school will not be permitted to operate for the remainder of the school year.
- (6) Each recognized independent school shall provide to the Secretary on October 1 of each year the names, genders, dates of birth, and addresses of its enrolled students. Within seven days of the termination of a student's enrollment, the recognized independent school shall notify the Secretary of the name and address of the student. The Secretary shall notify the appropriate school officials as provided in section 1126 of this title.
- (7) After the filing of the enrollment notice or at a hearing, if the school is unable to comply with any specific requirements due to deep religious conviction shared by an organized group, the Secretary may waive such requirements if he or she determines that the educational purposes of this subsection are being or will be substantially met.

Per Section C (3) above, below is Vermont Commons School's currently filed statement of objectives:

**Recognized Independent School Enrollment Notice**  
**2023 -2024 School Year**

**Section 1: School Information**

**Name of School:** Vermont Commons School  
**School Address:** 75 Green Mountain Drive, South Burlington, Vermont 05403  
**Phone Number:** (802) 865-8084  
**Website Address, if applicable:** www.vermontcommons.org  
**Head of School or Contact Person**

- **Name:** Dexter Mahaffey
- **Title:** Head of School
- **Phone Number:** (802) 865-8084
- **Email Address:** dmahaffey@vermontcommons.org

**Grade Levels Served (if you use an alternative system please describe below):** 6 - 12  
**For Profit or Non-Profit:** Non-profit  
**Name of Local School District or Supervisory Union:** South Burlington School District

**Section 2: School Schedule and Calendar**

<b>Applying Recognized School</b>	<b>The local public school serving students in the same or equivalent grades</b>
The school day begins at (time): 8:30 a.m.	The school day begins at (time): 8:40 a.m.
The school day concludes at (time): 3:30 p.m.	The school day concludes at (time): 3:20 p.m.
Total school days per academic year: 177	Total school days per academic year: 180
Comments:	

### Section 3: Minimum Course of Study

*Please provide a description or outline of your Minimum Course of Study for each grade that your school serves. If a grade level's Minimum Course of Study has not changed from your 2022-2023 enrollment notice, please indicate "see 2022-2023" in that grade text field.*

Grade Level	Describe the minimum course of study for students in this grade:
K	
Grade 1	
Grade 2	
Grade 3	
Grade 4	
Grade 5	
Grade 6	Math, science, social studies, English, Spanish, Arts, Health, Physical Education
Grade 7	Math, science, social studies, English, Spanish, Arts, Health, Physical Education
Grade 8	Math, science, social studies, English, Spanish, Arts, Health, Physical Education
Grade 9	Math, science, social studies, English, Spanish or Chinese, Arts or Electives, Health, Physical Education
Grade 10	Math, science, social studies, English, Spanish or Chinese, Arts or Electives, Health, Physical Education
Grade 11	Math, science, social studies, English, Spanish or Chinese, Arts or Electives
Grade 12	Math, science, social studies, English, Spanish or Chinese, Arts or Electives

**Describe the assessment tools and strategies employed by your school:** formative and summative assessments on a variety of student work and learning throughout the semester, using a 100-point scale averaged for cumulative grade in each class for the semester or year, depending on the discipline and duration of the class. Differentiated instruction and assessment as appropriate and practical. Standard contemporary college-preparatory approaches to pedagogy and assessment.

## Section 4: Statement of Assurances

In making this report to the Secretary, the school makes the following assurances:

- i. The school will prepare and maintain attendance records for each pupil enrolled or regularly attending classes;
- ii. At least once each year the school will assess each pupil's progress and will maintain records of that assessment, and present the results of that assessment to each student's parent or guardian;
- iii. The school's educational program will include the minimum course of study set forth in 16 V.S. A. §906;
- iv. The school will have teachers and materials sufficient to provide the minimum course of study;
- v. The school will meet such state and federal laws and regulations concerning its physical facilities and health and safety matters as are applicable to recognized independent schools, including:
  - Obtaining current certificate of occupancy from the Division of Fire Safety (*NFPA 101*; 20 V.S.A. §2730);
  - b. Conducting and documenting monthly fire drills (16 V.S.A. §1481);
  - c. Conducting and documenting "clear the halls" drills every other month(16 V.S.A. §1481);
  - d. Obtaining a current user's agreement with the Vermont Crime Information Center (VCIC) (16 V.S.A. §255);
  - e. Maintaining current immunization records or exceptions for all students (18 V.S.A. §1121);
  - f. Adapting and supporting a Vermont-compliant bullying, hazing, and harassment policy (16 V.S.A. §570).

Signature:  Print Name: Dexter Mahaffey

Title: Head of School Date: June 15, 2023



## MEMORANDUM

TO: Recognized Independent School Contacts  
FROM: Pat Pallas Gray, Independent School Consultant  
SUBJECT: Recognized School Enrollment Notice for 2024-2025  
DATE: April 29, 2024

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Enclosed is the information required annually to continue your school's recognized independent school status, pursuant to 16 V.S.A. §166(c). This information must be received by the Agency of Education (AOE) prior to the public schools in your area opening for the 2024-2025 school year. Please submit the completed forms no later than August 1, 2024. This will give the AOE an opportunity to respond to your notice in a timely manner.

These forms are also available on AOE's website on the independent school page at <https://education.vermont.gov/documents/edu-recognized-independent-school-enrollment-notice> in Microsoft Word format. We prefer to receive the completed forms electronically; and they should be sent to Pat Pallas Gray at [pat.pallasgray@vermont.gov](mailto:pat.pallasgray@vermont.gov). If you are unable to submit the forms electronically, they can be mailed to the following address:

Pat Pallas Gray  
Independent School Consultant  
Vermont Agency of Education  
1 National Life Drive, Davis 5  
Montpelier, VT 05602

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### Contact Information:

If you have questions about this document or would like additional information, please contact:

Pat Pallas Gray, School Finance Team, at [pat.pallasgray@vermont.gov](mailto:pat.pallasgray@vermont.gov) or (802) 917-2583



**Recognized Independent School Enrollment Notice  
2024 -2025 School Year**

**Section 1: School Information**

**Name of School:** Vermont Commons School  
**School Address:** 75 Green Mountain Drive, South Burlington, Vermont 05403  
**Phone Number:** (802) 865-8084  
**Website Address, if applicable:** www.vermontcommons.org  
**Head of School or Contact Person**

- **Name:** Dexter Mahaffey
- **Title:** Head of School
- **Phone Number:** (802) 865-8084, x 370
- **Email Address:** dmahaffey@vermontcommons.org

**Grade Levels Served (if you use an alternative system please describe below):** 6 - 12  
**For Profit or Non-Profit:** Non-profit  
**Name of Local School District or Supervisory Union:** South Burlington School District

**Section 2: School Schedule and Calendar**

Applying Recognized School	The local public school serving students in the same or equivalent grades
The school day begins at (time): 8:30 a.m.	The school day begins at (time): 8:55 a.m.
The school day concludes at (time): 3:30 p.m.	The school day concludes at (time): 3:20 p.m.
Total school days per academic year: 177	Total school days per academic year: 180
Comments:	



### Section 3: Minimum Course of Study

*Please provide a description or outline of your Minimum Course of Study for each grade that your school serves. If a grade level's Minimum Course of Study has not changed from your 2023-2024 enrollment notice, please indicate "see 2023-2024" in that grade text field.*

Grade Level	Describe the minimum course of study for students in this grade:
K	
Grade 1	
Grade 2	
Grade 3	
Grade 4	
Grade 5	
Grade 6	<i>see 2023-2024</i>
Grade 7	<i>see 2023-2024</i>
Grade 8	<i>see 2023-2024</i>
Grade 9	<i>see 2023-2024</i>
Grade 10	<i>see 2023-2024</i>
Grade 11	<i>see 2023-2024</i>
Grade 12	<i>see 2023-2024</i>

**Describe the assessment tools and strategies employed by your school:** formative and summative assessments on a variety of student work and learning throughout the semester, using a 100-point scale averaged for cumulative grade in each class for the semester or year, depending on the discipline and duration of the class. Differentiated instruction and assessment as appropriate and practical. Standard contemporary college-preparatory approaches to pedagogy and assessment. External assessments include SAT, ACT, and AP.

## Section 4: Statement of Assurances

**In making this report to the Secretary, the school makes the following assurances:**

- i. The school will prepare and maintain attendance records for each pupil enrolled or regularly attending classes;
- ii. At least once each year the school will assess each pupil's progress and will maintain records of that assessment, and present the results of that assessment to each student's parent or guardian;
- iii. The school's educational program will include the minimum course of study set forth in 16 V.S. A. §906;
- iv. The school will have teachers and materials sufficient to provide the minimum course of study;
- v. The school will meet such state and federal laws and regulations concerning its physical facilities and health and safety matters as are applicable to recognized independent schools, including:
  - Obtaining current certificate of occupancy from the Division of Fire Safety (*NFPA 101*; 20 V.S.A. §2730);
  - b. Conducting and documenting monthly fire drills (16 V.S.A. §1481);
  - c. Conducting and documenting "clear the halls" drills every other month(16 V.S.A. §1481);
  - d. Obtaining a current user's agreement with the Vermont Crime Information Center (VCIC) (16 V.S.A. §255);
  - e. Maintaining current immunization records or exceptions for all students (18 V.S.A. §1121);
  - f. Adapting and supporting a Vermont-compliant bullying, hazing, and harassment policy (16 V.S.A. §570).

**Signature:**



**Print Name: Dexter Mahaffey**

**Title: Head of School**

**Date: 5/6/2024**



State of Vermont  
1 National Life Drive, Davis 5  
Montpelier, VT 05620-2501  
[education.vermont.gov](http://education.vermont.gov)

[phone] 802-828-1130  
[fax] 802-828-6430

*Agency of Education*

August 28, 2024

Dexter Mahaffey, Headmaster  
VT Commons School  
75 Green Mountain Drive  
So. Burlington, VT 05403

Dear Dexter:

This is to inform you that after review of the information provided by Vermont Commons School, the Vermont Agency of Education considers the school for the 2024-2025 school year to be a Recognized Independent School within the meaning of 16 V.S.A. §166(c), providing education in grades 6-12.

Please notify the Agency of Education of any changes in the information you submitted.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (802) 917-2538.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pat Pallas Gray".

Patricia Pallas Gray  
Independent School Consultant



## **VERMONT COMMONS SCHOOL**

75 Green Mountain Drive, South Burlington, Vermont 05403  
[www.vermontcommons.org](http://www.vermontcommons.org) (802) 865-8084