



By late May of 2023, surveys seeking input on the future of the program and facilities at Vermont Commons had been sent out to students, administrative and teaching faculty, and parents/guardians. Three in-person sessions were held with the Faculty, two with students, and several with parents/guardians. Over the course of the more than half a year of these various opportunities for input, several trends emerged, as well as a variety of ideas for future growth of the school. This summary is broken into two sections: the first summarizes data from surveys, and the second highlights major concepts that emerged in conversations with the various stakeholders.

The same survey was distributed to students, parents/guardians, and teaching and administrative faculty and asked participants, “Which of [the following] feels most exciting or important when you imagine the future of VCS?” Respondents were allowed to select as many of the following possibilities as they liked, or none at all: Core Academics, Outdoor/Environmental Education, Athletics, Studio/Visual Arts, STEM, Performing Arts, Student Life, and Student Research/Student Learning. As you read the results, keep in mind that every single one of these eight possibilities was selected by a significant number of students, faculty, and parents/guardians as being “most exciting or important” in the future of VCS. What might seem *least-most* exciting numerically is still “most exciting” to a significant part of our community.

In the student survey, Student Life (meaning lounges, study spaces, etc.) had the highest response, with 74.4% of student respondents ranking this a priority. Outdoor/Environmental Education and Athletics were tied for second, with each category being prioritized by 54% of the students. And the remaining five topics shared similar weight with about 30% stating each of them were “most exciting or important” in VCS’s future.

In the Faculty survey, Outdoor/Environmental Education had the highest response, with 93% of faculty members ranking this a priority. Studio and Visual Arts was prioritized second, with 57% of the Faculty doing so. Core Academics, Performing Arts, and Student Research/Learning Support all shared 43% of faculty prioritization, followed by STEM, Student life, and Athletics receiving lower priority ranking from faculty.

Parents/Guardians provided input slightly differently, so their numbers are not percentages but instead simply raw numbers. Like the Faculty, Parents/Guardians most often selected Outdoor/Environmental Education. Core Academics and Performing Arts tied for second with about $\frac{1}{3}$ fewer votes, followed close behind by Student Life, Studio/Visual Arts, and Student

Research/Learning. STEM and Athletics received about half as many votes from parents/guardians as outdoor/environmental education.

Both the surveys and the public forums with students, faculty, and parents/guardians generated an enormous amount of ideas about the future of the school, with several trends emerging from each constituent group. In the **student** survey responses several trends emerged, including

- a more flexible curriculum and class offerings
- the development of outdoor learning spaces—specifically gardens, a greenhouse, a farm, and outdoor classrooms
- more sports and exercise offerings, from expanded PE to swimming, lacrosse, or soccer teams or a climbing wall
- more Art classes, particularly ceramics and dark room photography, and further developed arts facilities
- robotics and computer science classes
- availability of food options during the day, including vending machines and prepared meals
- student lounge spaces
- life skills and real world skills classes, including drivers education.

Trends emerging from **parents & guardians** included

- financial literacy/accounting classes, with a student-run store or cafe tied to this
- life skills classes
- space for expanded arts
- flexible learning spaces that can be used in multiple ways
- a library w/individuals carrels for quiet work and tables for collaboration
- auxiliary programming outside of school hours
- a design lab
- experiential learning connections with local start-up, tech, and engineering enterprises
- more P.E. offerings and expanded fitness facilities
- and expanded curricular offerings and flexibility in terms of how students can access coursework and learning

Trends emerging from **faculty** included

- a library with space for silent study and for small group quiet collaboration and small group study spaces in general
- gardens and greenhouses
- a dedicated performing arts space
- an integration of Studio Art and the Sciences programmatically and physically through a Design Lab
- further expansion of the Studio Art facilities including ceramics
- expansion of the Music Program and facilities

- additional classrooms, offices, and fully developed athletic/fitness spaces at the gym building
- a full prep kitchen for meals and teaching classes/Eweek, etc.,
- the parking lot, trail, and boardwalk at the Outdoor Ed Center
- transformation of the north parking lot at the Starbuck building into a field
- a low ropes course, and
- transformation of the lunch room into a student center/gathering space, with lounge areas, snackbar, work nooks, etc.

An expanded version of this presentation is still being drafted but will be shared soon. Next year, we will continue to work together to identify from among all the incredible ideas everyone has come up with 1) what we can actually do as a school in the future, 2) what are the most immediate priorities, and 3) an overall timeline and plan for everything we all decide to take on together. Some of these are grand efforts, such as turning the lunchroom into a modern student center; and things like that take time and significant money. But a lot of the ideas that have come up are things we can simply start taking on together and just get done with our own hands and effort, whether that's gardens, a more flexible curriculum, or sorting out vending machines or more meals on campus.

Thanks for your involvement so far in this long-term planning process, and here's to the future of VCS!