



# GUIDE FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

*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 ...

### Your first contact should be:

- a class → the Classroom Teacher
- multiple classes → your child's advisor
- A course subject/Department → the Department Chair
- Academic Affairs or Policy, planned absences → Jasmine Walker
- Student Affairs, Advisors → Tim Harger
- Encounter Weeks → Ben Wang
- IT, Forms, Renweb, Communications → Steve Lausier
- College Counseling → Marta Beede & Susan Wertheimer
- Athletics → Kyler Star
- Business Office, Billings, Financial Aid → Linda Bursell
- Buses, daily attendance, Head of School scheduling → Katherine Bailey

# I. ACADEMIC LIFE, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES

## HOMework

Homework should have a purpose or goal relating to the learning of students. As a community that values conversation between students and teachers, we strive to create an environment in which students are encouraged to respectfully ask questions about the intent of assignments and engage in conversation about work they are given. This environment provides students with an opportunity to learn how to approach and engage with a teacher and gives teachers an opportunity to explain their thought process. In addition, both students and teachers alike can shift their opinions as a result of respectful discussion.

### Live By Five

Homework is posted on RenWeb by 5pm the day it is assigned in class, and all necessary resources (ex. Scanned reading on Google Classroom) are also to be accessible at 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. (Discussion about the purpose of an assignment should take place outside of class time.) 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.

### Break

Teachers may assign one night's worth of homework over break. When assigning long-term assignments that are due after break, teachers may count break as one day'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* after it is assigned, counting the entirety of winter break as one single day. If something regarding homework changes over break, teachers notify their students by way of email that their assignment on RenWeb has changed and provide sufficient additional time to complete it. 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 fully immerse themselves 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 weighted averages of semesters (45%) and exams or culminating projects (10%).

### Grading Scale

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

- **WP, WF, WM** - A designation is recorded for all courses in cases where a student withdraws from the class or from Vermont Commons School prior to the end of a semester.
  - WP: Withdrawn Passing means that a student's class average for the semester at the time of the withdrawal is 60 percent or above.
  - WF: Withdrawn Failing means that a student's class average for the semester at the time of the withdrawal is below 60 percent.
  - WM: Withdrawn Medical means that a student has withdrawn from the class for medical reasons. These grades are not calculated into a student's GPA, and they are not awarded credit.
- **I** – If extenuating circumstances arise during a 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. The student will then have two weeks from the end of the semester to make up the missing work. 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 appear on their transcripts but are not included in the GPA. The scores are based on the grading rubric below:

- 5 – Exceeded expectations in all areas. Consistently helpful without being asked, engaged enthusiastically in all activities, always interacted in a positive manner with group members, demonstrated leadership commensurate with age.
- 4 – Exceeded some or all expectations. Student was not significantly deficient in any area.
- 3 – Consistently met expectations or exceeded expectations in some areas but was deficient in others.
- 2 – Consistently fell short of most or all expectations.
- 1 – Fell significantly short of expectations, and/or exhibited behavior that caused serious detriment to group functioning or safety, and/or consistently failed to engage in group activities.

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

Vermont Commons School has established a system of assessment intended to measure student progress through the mastery and application of skills and content. To provide a complete picture of progress, students receive 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  $\frac{1}{2}$  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. A grade of "I" is given until work is completed, which must occur within two weeks from the last day of the semester.

## **Final Exams and Culminating Projects**

Final Exams are administered and/or Culminating Projects are completed in the following subjects during a five-day exam period at the end of the first and second semesters: English, Mathematics, History/Social Studies, Science, and World Languages. Exams run for 2 hours for 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders and 1½ hours for 8<sup>th</sup> graders in the spring exam periods. 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders do not take exams; 8<sup>th</sup> 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 8<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> 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% is placed on the Honor Roll. High Honors are awarded to students with a GPA of 93% or higher. E-Week, health, and PE grades are not calculated into the GPA and therefore are not considered part of Honor Roll designations.

## **Academic Warning**

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

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

## **Academic Probation**

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

- Probation tenets will be devised by the advisor, teachers, Watch & Support team, and appropriate administrators. Improvement in grades and satisfaction of the probation tenets should occur with a reasonable timeframe.
- Possible tenets may include 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.

## **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, and a semester each of Electives and Arts. The Department Chairs reserve the right to adjust a requirement after a process of application and review.

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

- 4 years of English
- 4 years of Sciences
- 4 years of Mathematics
- 4 years of World Language
- 4 years of History and the Social Sciences
- 4 semesters of the Arts
- 4 semesters of Electives (may be replaced by an internship Senior year)
- 4 years of Physical Education (*each year a student may meet this requirement by **two** of the following: a trimester of PE class, an active Encounter Week with at least a grade of 3 and no more than one missed day, a school sport, or a trimester of approved independent athletic/physical activity*)
- 11 Encounter Weeks

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. Students who have accelerated in World Language by successfully completing either Spanish V or Chinese V by the end of Junior year (or earlier) are not required to be enrolled for credit in a World Language course thereafter in order to graduate.

**Additional Requirements:**

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

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

**Additional Information:**

- Students who enter Vermont Commons in 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade may be eligible for an individualized graduation plan as determined by the Department Chairs' Committee.
- Students receiving less than 60% as a final grade in a class are typically required to repeat that level, either via a summer program or during the following academic year, depending on the subject matter.
- Students with diagnosed learning differences may be waived from some requirements.

## Health

Each grade level has a specific group of health topics that are developmentally appropriate. These topics are explored throughout the school year in a variety of formats including seminars, retreats and brief lecture.

## Physical Education

Physical Education classes meet twice a week (Monday and Friday) from 2:35 to 3:30. All Middle School students are enrolled in a PE course. Each year high school students meet their requirement by completing **two** of the following (one may be repeated, if desired): trimester of M/F PE class, an active Encounter Week with a grade of a least a 3 and no more than one day absent, a school sport, or a trimester of approved independent athletic/physical activity. If high school students are not participating in a PE class, they are expected to remain on campus on M/F unless parents have signed them out.

## Add/Drop Period

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

# 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 multi-aged setting that encourages leadership and fosters group skills. Each advisory partners with a local non-profit in order to provide three hours of community service the second Wednesday of each month.

# SENIOR INTERNSHIPS

As a capstone to the community-based Service Program, 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 three school-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 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.

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. 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 8.5, and they receive a score of no less than 2 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 for the same duration of time missed during the Encounter Week. Successful completion of this independent Encounter project will receive proportional points towards the year-end minimum of 8.5.

The **cost** of Encounter Weeks is included in the price of tuition, with the exception 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.

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.

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 the student medical permission form in RenWeb indicates your permission to do so. Trip leaders record date, time, amount, and recipient of any medication taken on the trip.

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 him or her 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 Assistant Head of School one week before Honors petitions are due.

## 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 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 May, students share their projects with the community. Presentations take a variety of forms, but should reflect on the experience as well as the research and analysis performed during the project. 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 three certificates of concentration recognized through association with a graduate’s diploma at their graduation ceremony. These allow our particularly dedicated students to dig deeply into their passions and explore an area of interest with faculty mentorship and independent work at a high level of scholarship over a multi-year period.

### Arts Certificate of Concentration

#### Overview

The Arts Certificate is awarded to a student who exhibits a command of the arts by studying the processes in the various Vermont Commons School Arts Curricula.

#### Goals

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

#### Certificate Requirements

- **Vermont Commons School Arts GPA of 87% or higher.**
  - Students must maintain a GPA within the Arts Programs of 87% or higher.
- **Independent Project**
  - Each certificate student must design an independent project in a chosen medium to be developed with the instructor.
- **Art Exposition, Presentation, or Publication**
  - Upon the completion of the Independent Project, each student must publicly display or present the project, highlighting the completed work.

#### Transcripts

This program is based upon and closely follows traditional Master of Fine Arts degree (MFA) culminating project models. The rigorous independent project of the Arts Certificate can and typically does begin a year or two before senior year; however, the formal planning for the culminating Arts Project and Exposition, Presentation, or Publication is recorded on the transcript only during the fall and spring of senior year as coursework-in-progress, specifically denoted “Art: Arts Certificate Studio Hours.” This designation is the equivalent of dissertation research hours used by Ph.D.-granting institutions and operates in precisely the same manner, in that it is non-graded coursework, the final evaluation of which

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

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

#### **Applications:**

1. Check with your academic advisor to be sure that you have met the academic requirements.
2. Inform the Chair of the relevant Department (in writing) that you are interested in pursuing the Arts Certificate of Concentration. Write a draft, with your Chair's assistance, of a proposal for your pursuit of the Diploma Certificate and present it to the Diploma Certificate Granting Committee *before* you begin officially to pursue the Certificate. The Committee's initial approval is required for pursuit of a Diploma Certificate and that approval must be secured prior to the end of the student's Junior year.
3. Develop your Independent Project
  - If you are going to use your Senior Project, meet with the arts faculty to be sure that your project is appropriate, and to ensure that your Vermont Commons School project advisor and community sponsor are aware of this program.
  - If you are not going to use your Senior Project, identify a Vermont Commons School arts faculty member who will serve as your advisor and develop a project proposal. This written application will include: deadlines, a faculty/community advisor, and a description of the end product.
4. Publish a date for your exposition of work in your chosen medium.

## **Naturalist Certificate of Concentration**

### **Overview**

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

## Goals

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

## Certificate Requirements

- **Vermont Commons School Science GPA of 87%**
  - Naturalists must demonstrate a mastery of the fundamental science concepts that will enable them to effect positive change in their environment. As part of this curriculum, students will successfully complete the equivalent of high school biology, chemistry, and physics.
- **Naturalist Project**
  - Students will design, carry out, and communicate the results of, an independent project which demonstrates their ability to effect real change in their environment. This project could take the form of the Vermont Commons School Senior Project. If this Project is not the Vermont Commons School Senior Project, it must meet similar requirements and standards. In late spring of the senior year, the presentation of the Naturalist Project is made to the Science Department, the Assistant Head of School, and the Head of School. It is also open to the broader Vermont Commons School community.
- **Naturalist Tour**
  - During the senior year spring semester, the student will design and lead a tour of the local watershed for the Vermont Commons School community, including the Science Department, Assistant Head of School, and the Head of School. Naturalists will demonstrate their knowledge, with special attention to geology, flora/fauna, and the history of humans in the Champlain Valley. In the case of a student who has pursued lab-based work or a scientific project outside the realm of traditional naturalist study, the tour will be of the location or facility appropriate to their work and/or research.

## Transcripts

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

upon and at the student's graduation ceremony at the same time the student's diploma is awarded). As one of the highest honors a student can achieve, the awarding of an Advanced Certification Program is announced during the conferring of the Vermont Commons School diploma at graduation.

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

### **Applications**

1. Check with academic advisor to be sure that you have met the academic requirements.
2. Inform the Chair of the Science Department (in writing) that you are interested in pursuing the Naturalist Certificate. Write a draft, with your Chair's assistance, of a proposal for your pursuit of the Diploma Certificate and present it to the Diploma Certificate Granting Committee *before* you begin officially to pursue the Certificate. The Committee's initial approval is required for pursuit of a Diploma Certificate and that approval must be secured prior to the end of the student's Junior year.
3. Develop your Independent Project.
  - If you are going to use your Senior Project, meet with the science faculty to be sure that your project is appropriate, and to ensure that your Vermont Commons School project advisor and community sponsor are aware of this program.
  - If you are not going to use your Senior Project, identify a Vermont Commons School Science faculty member who will serve as your advisor and develop a project proposal. This written application will include; deadlines, a faculty/community advisor, and a description of the end product.
4. Publish a date for your Naturalist Tour.

### **Global Citizen Certificate of Concentration**

The Global Citizen Certificate of Concentration challenges and supports students to more deeply develop their capacity as engaged citizens of the world through global literacy and competency. Vermont Commons School seeks to develop global understanding and empathy, nurture an appreciation for the diversity of cultures, and challenge students to take action to address global needs.

### **General Requirements**

1. High-level, in-depth learning to develop a deep level of understanding of a chosen global issue.
2. An independent project to put knowledge & understanding into action.
3. A presentation to the school community and/or greater community, to teach about the global issue and share experience & learning.

### **Application Process**

1. Check with your academic advisor to be sure that you have met the academic requirement based on completed VCS high school classes.
2. Inform the Chairs of the Social Studies and World Language Departments (in writing) that you are interested in pursuing the Global Citizen Certificate.
3. Find a Global Citizen Certificate Faculty Adviser, and collaborate to develop a focus for your certificate work.
4. Write a proposal, with your GCC Faculty Adviser's assistance, for your pursuit of the Diploma Certificate and present it in person to the Diploma Certificate Granting Committee *before* you begin officially to pursue the Certificate. The Committee's initial approval is required for pursuit of a Diploma Certificate and that approval must be secured prior to the end of the student's Junior year.
5. Engage in rigorous learning about your chosen global topic.
6. Engage in a real-world project to put your learning into action and address a global need related to your certificate work.
7. Present your learning and work to the full GC Certificate Granting Committee for final assessment.
8. Present to the school community, and possibly to the greater community as well.

### **Academic Qualification**

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

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

### **Transcript**

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

So that colleges and universities to which the senior is applying understand the exceptional rigor and advanced academic nature of this program--and those rare individuals at Vermont Commons School

who pursue it--a copy of this program policy from the *Vermont Commons School Guide for Students and Families* is to be included with all applications for admission to colleges and universities made by the student in the fall and/or winter of their senior year.

## 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.

**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.

## 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. 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. 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.

### **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.

## 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 Test Scores:** 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). Some students also three subject tests. The recommended timetable for this testing is as follows:

September

- Seniors: ACT

October

- Sophomores: pre-ACT
- Juniors: PSAT
- Seniors: SAT or SAT subject tests, ACT

November

- Seniors: SAT or SAT subject tests

April

- Juniors: ACT

May

- Juniors: SAT or SAT subject tests

June

- Juniors: SAT or SAT subject tests, ACT

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. 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 has representatives who serve on the Senate. The student body elects these students during a core group meeting early in the spring of each year. Students who wish to serve on the Senate have an opportunity to declare their candidacy on Election Day. Students address their core group and state their goals and objectives. The election is by closed ballot and votes are counted by the Dean of Students. 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, at the same time of year as the elections for the other representatives. The President of the Student Body has several additional responsibilities:

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

- Invited to Board meetings as a guest at during the year
- Serve on Board Committees

**Other responsibilities:**

- Plan, oversee and lead Student Senate meetings
- Serve as the voice of the student body when one is sought for decisions
- Represent the school at school fairs, Open Houses, and other events
- Make occasional presentations to the faculty at faculty meetings
- Serve on an as-needed basis on various school committees

## **EVENINGS OF STUDENT READINGS**

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

## **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. Parents may request the withholding of these privileges; should they choose to do so, that request should come to the Dean of Students.

- Seniors may arrive at school at 9:20 a.m. for morning meeting if they have a study hall 1<sup>st</sup> period.
- Seniors may leave campus 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 provided they do their chore before they depart.

- Seniors may leave school at 2:30 if they have a study hall scheduled last period or – on Mondays and Fridays at 2:30 – have no sport team, activity, or P.E. obligation on campus.
- 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 in the morning if a child

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

To notify the school of any of the above, parents should call the school prior to the first period at 802-865-8084. Parents should leave a message in the “General Mailbox” if the receptionist does not answer in person. Parents may also send an email to Katherine Bailey, Assistant to the Head of School, at [kbailey@vermontcommons.org](mailto:kbailey@vermontcommons.org). A student must sign in and out at the Front Office whenever s/he arrives late, leaves school during the day, or returns to school after leaving.

Tardiness to any class is disrespectful and disruptive 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 required). 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**

When possible, assignments should be presented to faculty on the day the student returns to school. In cases of illness or extended absence, extensions of homework deadlines are often warranted. This accommodation should be discussed and agreed upon on the day of 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 the student to take a medical leave of absence from school. Medical leaves are treated as excused absences, and a doctor's note is required in all cases. Appropriate administrators will review all situations requiring a medical leave. Although a leave may in some cases be limited to a reduced workload rather than a full leave, students are encouraged to continue to produce academic work during their leave. Medical leave does not safeguard credit until all coursework is completed. Medical leaves that exceed one 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 receptionist 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:

- 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.

## 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 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
  - The student comes to a Department Chairs meeting to answer questions and to address concerns
- **Requirements**
  - Student 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.
- Student 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 tuitions 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.

## **STUDY HALL & FREE PERIODS**

Middle school students attend study hall periods each week with the expectation that they will seek out extra help and work independently or with peers to complete assignments and prepare for class. High

school students have free periods when they do not have classes. If a student is struggling academically, the Watch & 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 Lunch Room or outside. After students eat, they may choose to spend time in the Art Studio, outside on the school grounds, or meeting with teachers. With the exception of water, all food and beverages are to be limited to the kitchen and cafeteria except as permitted by classroom teachers. The intent of lunch as part of our time together in community is that it be screen-free; the use of phones, computers, and all other internet-capable devices is discouraged at this time.

## **PICK UP 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 5:00 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:

- Faculty report the incident 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 service to the community, written apologies, behavioral warning or probation, suspension, other responses deemed to be appropriate to the situation, or dismissal from the school. In all actions, students and parents are informed of the result and a notation is made in the student's file.

### **Classroom management**

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

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.

## **WEAPONS POLICY**

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

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

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

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

## STANCE ON NONVIOLENCE

Violence is antithetical to the very core of Vermont Commons 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, BULLYING, AND HARASSMENT POLICY

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

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

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

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

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

*Bullying is a form of dangerous and disrespectful behavior that may involve a range of misconduct that, based on the severity, will warrant a measured response of corrective action and/or discipline. Bullying is defined as any overt act or combination of such acts directed against a student by another student or group of students and which*

- *Occurs during the school day on school property, on a school bus, or at a school-sponsored activity;*
- *Is intended to ridicule, humiliate, or intimidate the student; and*
- *Is repeated over time.<sup>1</sup>*

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

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

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

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

- Anonymous Reporting: Dean of Students' Mailbox
  - Personal Reporting: Dean of Students, Vermont Commons School, 75 Green Mountain Drive, So. Burlington, VT 05403, 802-865-8084
- b) Encourages parents or guardians of student to file written reports of suspected hazing, harassment, or bullying. *See (a) above.*
  - c) Requires teachers and other school staff who witness acts of harassment, hazing, or bullying or receive student reports of same to notify the Dean of Students.
  - d) Requires the Dean of Students to accept and review all reports of hazing, harassment, and bullying, including anonymous reports. If after inquiry, an anonymous or oral report appears to warrant further investigation, school administrators shall promptly continue with an investigation. School administrators shall investigate any written reports.
  - e) As with any other disciplinary action, this policy requires school staff to notify the parent or guardian of a student who commits a verified act of hazing, harassment, or bullying of the response of the school staff and consequences that may result from further acts.
  - f) To the extent permitted under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, (FERPA), requires school staff to notify the parent or guardian of a student who is a target of hazing, harassment, or bullying of the action taken to prevent any further acts of bullying.<sup>3</sup>

For further explanation, see the Dean of Students or Vermont Statutes Online at:

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

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

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

<sup>3</sup>FERPA is a federal law designed to protect the confidentiality of student records and the school district must comply with this law, as well as a similar state law. When the school administrator contacts a parent about the school district's response to a bullying incident, 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 subjected to the bullying.

## 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.

## **DOG-FREE BUILDING POLICY**

With occasional exception of therapeutic animals under the direct control of the School Counselor, Vermont Commons School building is a dog-free building. Please keep your pets under control at all times if you bring them to campus, and please keep them outside 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 son or daughter to school events and field trips.

## CRISIS MANAGEMENT COMMANDS

- **Clear the Halls:** Go to closest room supervised by an adult. Close and lock the door. Students and staff remain away from doors and windows. Use phone only for emergencies. Classroom instruction may continue. *This command is communicated in person.*
- **Secure the School:** Students outdoors enter the building. All students go to closest room supervised by an adult. Adults close doors and lock if possible. Students and staff remain away from doors and windows and stay low to the floor. Turn off lights and shut curtains/blinds on doors and windows (if available). Administrators secure outside doors. *This command is communicated in person and by RenWeb alert.*
- **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 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 cell phone-free campus. Cell phones are usually not permitted when participating in off-campus activities, but may be allowed at the discretion of the teacher. If a cell phone is seen or heard, the student will be asked to turn off the phone and give it to the teacher. The faculty member will notify the dean of students. The student may reclaim the phone when they leave for the day. Further incidents may involve parents/guardians and may require a discussion about how best to live up to our community standards.

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' computing resources, maintain the highest confidentiality of stored information, and promote the highest educational usage of Vermont Commons School' 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 Technologies: RenWeb

Vermont Commons School provides a variety of ways to access information and faculty, including the school website and Google calendars, RenWeb, and the Remote Desktop Server on which students and faculty can save and share documents. Homework can be printed from the school server to any of the

networked printers. We recommend that students email themselves assignments and print from our computer lab or student printers if they cannot print at home.

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

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

Please contact the Registrar, Steve Lausier, with questions.

## V. Mostly For Parents

### 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 circumstance in a recipient family. An award one year is not a guarantee of an award or the same proportional award thereafter; changes in awards typically arise due to a changing financial status of the school or parents. In accordance with the best practices established by the National Association of Independent Schools (the School's accrediting body), it is the goal of the School each year to distribute 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 RenWeb. To access it, follow these steps:

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

## VI. Vermont Agency of Education Statements

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

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

## **VERMONT COMMONS SCHOOL**

**75 Green Mountain Drive, South Burlington, Vermont 05403**

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