

Vermont Commons School Curriculum

Dear Parents/Guardians and Students,

Vermont Commons School's curriculum utilizes collaborative, hands-on, and field-based teaching methodologies to develop and inspire intellectualism, practical skills, and grit. Our graduates tend to find themselves overly prepared--in the best sense--for the college educations they pursue after Vermont Commons.

Our students write and read intensively, apply Science and Math principles interconnectedly, understand Social Studies in the context of global history, and immerse themselves in World Languages through story, cultural study, and international exchange. They pursue a range of elective topics as well as yearly, ongoing study of the arts. Course offerings integrate topics into multi-year studies rather than as separate and distinct courses. Students further along in their studies have a variety of independent and self-designed learning options, from Contract Honors courses to Internships or specialized Diploma Certificates. This curricular approach and our small class sizes allow for creativity and collaboration. Vermont Commons students grow into critical and innovative

House of Commons
EX

DWBLL

VERMONT COMMONS SCHOOL

ACADEMIC INFORMATION

Courses and Programs

The central purpose of all academic activities at Vermont Commons School is to provide students with the skills, knowledge, and experiences to understand the interconnection of their local and global ecosystems and communities, to recognize their own roles in these systems, and to formulate a personal investment in their natural and social worlds. The study of place affords the opportunity to discover and explore how one's environment, community, and actions are interconnected with the rest of the world. In order to accomplish this goal, each discipline provides students with the opportunity to develop the skills to describe, understand, analyze, communicate, and interact within their local and global communities. The course of study in Science,

Advanced Academic Opportunities

While coursework at Vermont Commons School is generally rigorous and intensive, several opportunities exist for students whose needs go beyond that established curriculum.

Contract Honors, an alternative to Advanced Placement courses, provides students with greater challenge, complexity, and coursework in grades 10-12. Teachers make the option to participate in Contract Honors available to students who meet the department's prerequisites, and students then "contract" for additional studies and earn an Honors designation for those courses on their transcripts. The

allows juniors and seniors the opportunity to apply to the Curriculum Committee to pursue limited off-campus study of a course in lieu of one of their academic courses per semester at Vermont Commons. For students of rare motivation and academic drive, the school offers an Advanced Diploma Certificate Program. Begun prior to senior year, the special diploma certificate program involves working with a faculty advisor on an advanced, long-term research or creative project, as well as review by and engagement with the broader community. On occasion, and at times linked with one of the Advanced Diploma Certificate Programs, exceptional older students may additionally enroll in course work at one of the local colleges or universities.

Academic Support

Students who need to shore up academic skills, improve background knowledge, or struggle with their learning profile often seek tutoring. The Vermont Commons Learning Specialist coordinates professional tutors from the local community to work with students with learning differences. These optional services are based on private pay and may fit into study halls, lunchtime or before- and after-school schedules.

College Counseling Program

Vermont Commons School is committed to providing individualized college counseling to each student and family through a four-year program of information, test preparation, college visits, admissions guidance, and application support. Beginning in the junior year, each student works one-on-one with the Director of Counseling to evaluate his or her strengths, personal growth, and academic profile. With this guidance, students find colleges and universities that best match their academic, social, extracurricular, and geographic needs. The school utilizes Naviance, an online program, to assist in the college search and application process.

Throughout the junior and senior years, the College Counseling Office keeps students and families informed of college admissions events. College admissions representatives regularly visit Vermont Commons, and students are encouraged to attend the information sessions. In addition, the College Counselor routinely visits campuses in order to promote Vermont Commons and gather information to share with families. A listing of colleges offering admission to our graduates can be found on the school's website.

COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

,

,

,

.

.

-

□

8th Grade

The 57 Bus, Romeo and

students are introduced to trigonometry and right-triangle theory. This segues into a rigorous unit on inductive and deductive reasoning where there is further emphasis on using logical reasoning in proofs. Finally, the year ends by looping back to algebra with a unit on exponential models

Math 4: Advanced Algebra and Plane Geometry

This course begins with a comprehensive study of functions, including understanding their transformations and how they affect both their graphs and their equations. Functions of interest include linear, reciprocal, absolute value, quadratic, cubic, cube root, square root, reciprocal of quadratic, exponential, and logarithmic. Students then dig deeper into the quadratic function leading to exploring what the different forms of the equations tell us about the graphs and using a variety of methods, including the quadratic formula, to solve them to find the roots—including imaginary ones. Then students dive into exponential relationships starting off with recursive and explicit sequences and leading to real life applications, such as compound interest. Through exploring inverse functions, students uncover logarithmic relationships both graphically and algebraically as they use them to solve equations. The course ends with a mini-unit on the geometry of circles where students delve into the abstract world of plane geometry with circles as the context.

Statistics

This course explores a statistical approach to decision making under uncertainty. Topics include descriptive statistics, probability distributions, inferential statistics, confidence intervals, hypothesis testing, linear regression and correlation. The focus of this class is on the use of statistics as a tool to help navigate through an uncertain world of stats, facts, data, information, and persuasive arguments generated by entities that may not have your best interest in mind. As a consumer of information it is important to know when this information is significant and when it is meaningless. As a distributor of information it is useful to know how to present your data/argument in a clear and truthful manner. As a decision maker it is useful to know how to base decisions on statistical evidence and protect yourself from uncertainties.

Pre-Calculus

In the first semester, students explore function manipulation, specifically looking at the behavior

In this course, students examine key concepts in chemistry in the context of developing laboratory and quantitative analysis skills. The class begins by studying the properties of matter at the macroscopic and atomic levels, including models of atoms. Students distinguish among physical, chemical, and nuclear changes in matter. Students become proficient users of the Periodic Table and use it to understand such concepts as isotopes, atomic number, electronegativity, and chemical bonding. Study of the evolution of atomic theory from the time of the ancient Greeks through the modern day illustrates science's role in the continuous improvement of human understanding of the natural world. Laboratory activities throughout the semester develop students' scientific skills, including logical thinking and problem solving, execution of experiments at the lab bench, data collection and analysis, and collaboration and communication skills.

Biology I

The first half of this class focuses on cellular processes, especially with respect to protein synthesis, metabolism, and genetics. Building on their chemistry experience, students learn the basics of organic chemistry while focusing on the processes of photosynthesis and cellular respiration and their roles in the origins of life on Earth. Labs include examinations of genetics, osmosis, and microscopy. The second half is devoted to comparative anatomy of animals. A systems-based approach reveals the evolution of the animal body plan, always comparing other systems to mammalian organ systems. This is an intensive lab course, and most of the second half is spent dissecting multiple specimens.

Physics I

This course uses the study of motion to introduce students to the overarching goal of physics – explanation of the behavior of matter and energy in the precise language of mathematics. The course begins with study of kinematics, introducing students to vector and scalar quantities and using the kinematic equations to analyze one- and two-dimensional motion. Newton's Laws of Motion are the foundation of a unit on dynamics, which also includes study of Newton's Law of Universal Gravitation as well as the effects of friction on the motion of objects. The course makes frequent use of demonstrations, short activities, and lab experiments to let students make hands-on connections to the concepts introduced in the course. In a term project, students apply their understanding to a topic of their choosing, using video analysis as a tool to enable quantitative description of the motion of selected objects.

Biology II

The class focuses on the history of evolutionary theory including the history of the belief system vs. scientific method debate to explain the origin and variation of life on Earth, pre-Darwinian theories

Elective: Forensics -

A truly multidisciplinary science that leverages students' logic and creativity, forensics is an intensively collaborative

specific topics of interest, followed by presentation of findings in class discussion. Appropriate specimens are an integral part of the course for each studied organism.

Elective: Zoology

College-level readings and independent experimentation are large parts of the course. Students engage in an examination of the Kingdom Animalia. Using a phylogenetic approach, students explore the evolutionary history of our Kingdom, students spend most of a semester studying invertebrate members of Animalia. During the second portion of the course, students study the human phylum, Chordata. Extensive work in the lab involves dissections of various organisms including Octopus, Water Snakes, and Pigeons to Rabbits.

Elective: Oceanography

This elective examines the world's oceans. Starting from a purely abiotic perspective, students learn about marine geology and chemistry. From that foundation, students explore the incredible biodiversity within those ecosystems. Significant group work takes the form of debates of historical and modern conflicts regarding the many uses of oceans. A field trip to the coast helps students acquire firsthand experience of these systems.

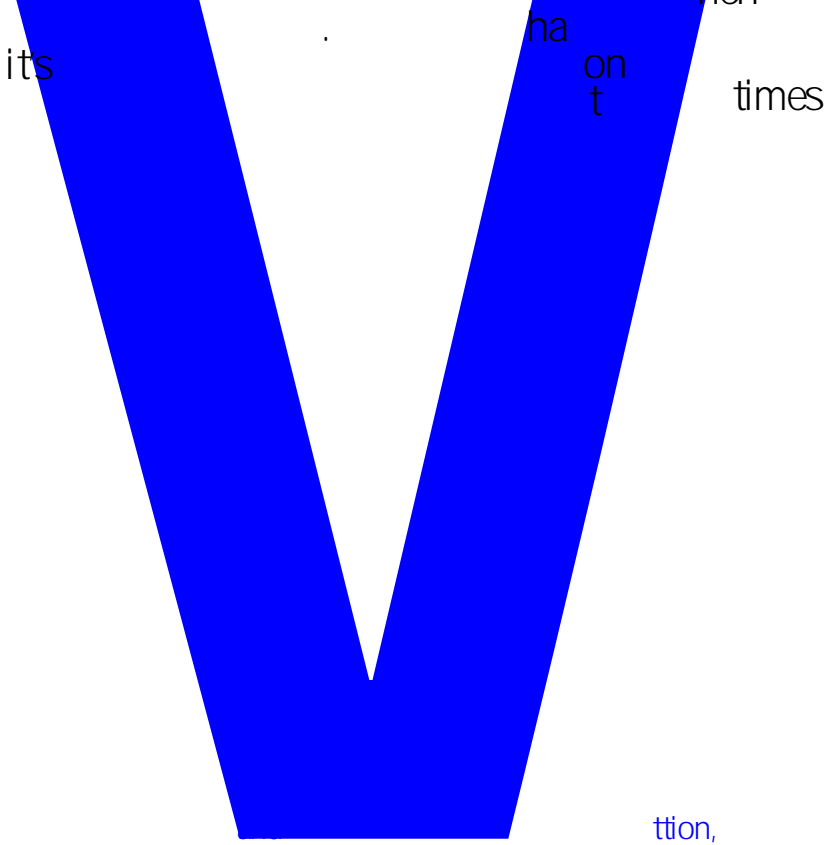
these

This course focuses on the structure and composition of the Earth and the processes that alter it. Why learn about that? The physical Earth and the forces that shape it provide the foundation for life, are incredibly powerful and dynamic, and yet most people rarely give them a second thought. Major topics of the class may include plate tectonics, volcanism, rock and mineral I

States and its social, legal, and political consequences. The course then moves to the present day as students apply what they have learned about identity, belonging, and community to the topic of immigration from Central America, both through reading a realistic fiction text and engaging with local community partners. They end the year studying indigenous American experiences and finally, students engage in local projects to help create a welcoming community that offers membership to every person regardless of race, gender, religion, or nationality.

Empires, Networks & Beliefs through 1500CE

This course explores the global maturing of complex human civilizations, belief systems and the growth of human networks.



Electives

Students vote to choose a semester-long elective on relevant topics based on regional or historical themes that expand into broader-based analytical historical methodology and content. Students prioritize their courses and are enrolled accordingly. Past offerings include:

Elective: The Vote: 2022

Here you are, on the cusp of being a voter (or maybe you already are!), in one of the most momentous times in our country's history. As you, your family, your friends, and your neighbors head to the polls in November, you'll be taking part in one of the greatest traditions and duties of citizenship. And yet, it's a tradition with a fraught and contested history, which tells us critical paths about who those in power see as fully American. In this course, we track the actual 2022 Congressional Election, looking at polling, media coverage, strategy, and developing news as it happens. When the election ends and votes begin

priorities? What would that even look like? Through our exploration of the burgeoning field of Ecological Economics we explore a wide range of issues this semester including: capitalism, climate change & natural resource depletion, the American Dream, individualism & personal freedom, social responsibility, happiness & wellbeing, community & neighborliness, wealth inequality, debt & consumerism, and much, much more.

Elective: #RESIST

While our current political moment seems to brim over with examples of political and social resistance, these forces are nothing new and have deep roots in the understanding of what it means to be a citizen. In this course, we focus on two central themes: the philosophical roots of political and social resistance movements, and then the tactics that movements across the political spectrum have used to pursue their goals for change. We

Elective: Perspectives on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

society and politics, from indigenous nations and worker owned businesses to peasant driven sustainable agriculture and finance dominated global cities to terrorism and war.

Elective:

background

small group instruction. Most work is sketchbook-based, with a focus on practicing the skills, rather than the final product. Students can expect to have foundational drawing skills, whether they want to be an artist or gain confidence in their drawing to use in other classes, like their science journals!

Music Foundations

The class focuses on developing skills in creating, analyzing, and responding to music. Students gain foundational knowledge of musical concepts such as form, tempo, dynamics, and texture, as well as basic skills on a variety of instruments—including but not limited to keyboard, ukulele, guitar, string instruments, voice, and percussion.

Music Production

The intention of the course is to provide both performing musicians and music consumers alike with the tools and skills to create music that sounds like what they love to listen to. This project-based class involves significant independent work, and requires time and technology management skills. Students are able to self-select their desired challenge level and the specific production skills in which they want to develop fluency over the course of the semester.

Music Studio – Vocal and Instrumental Options

th at tar

In music studio

This class is a combination of full-group and studio time. During full-group

Lastly, they show a collection of artworks made in the class at Arts Night OR create a website to house their portfolio of work from the course.

Ceramics: Hand-Building Functional Pottery

Throughout this course, beginner-level students learn the foundations of functional ceramics including hand-building techniques of pinch, coil, and slab. If possible, 1-1 instruction in wheel-throwing may also be introduced. Through the progression of the semester, projects become more creative as students develop their skills beyond the basic techniques. After projects have been bisque-fired, underglazing and glazing techniques, including slip trailing, dipping, brushing, and sgraffito are used to adorn and provide a waterproof, food-safe coating. At the end of the semester, students take home handmade bowls, plates, cups, and more that will last a lifetime.

Photography

Photography is a semester-long class focused on learning the art of taking photographs. While most of our time is spent taking pictures, we also learn how to make those pictures as good as possible by examining the functions of a camera, the qualities of engaging photographs, editing techniques, and the works of famous photographers. This is a class designed for beginners, but students of any skill level can participate. Students with previous experience or training in photography can request to take the course for Contract Honors.

Advanced Portfolio

Advanced Portfolio is for students who wish to develop a series of cohesive artworks, especially those who wish to learn how to use portfolios for college applications or to market themselves as artists. The beginning of the course focuses on developing visual language and expression within the visual art mediums of each student's choice. Students have deadlines throughout the semester based on their personal goals for their body of work. There is also particular attention to writing supporting Artist Statements to be displayed.

Vocal Studio is for students who want one-on-one instruction and coaching in vocal technique. Everyone physically sings, but so many people are hesitant to sing with or in front of others. In this class, students learn how to use vocal technique to expand their range and expression and become more confident singers. Each student in this class is required to perform for an audience multiple times in the semester. By the end of the semester, students will be able to sing with accurate, consistent intonation; develop coordinated breath support to increase vocal stamina and control; and establish beneficial practice habits to help maintain vocal development. Depending on course registration, Vocal Studio and Vocal Ensemble may be combined into one class.

Vocal Ensemble

Vocal Ensemble is for students who want to sing with others! Sometimes the class functions like a typical chorus, with the teacher as director and sheet music in students' hands. Other times students take the lead on both song selection and rehearsal, with the teacher serving as coach, guide, and provider of resources. This class leans heavily on the use of practice recordings, which enables students to have significantly more autonomy and independence than in a traditional choral ensemble. Each student in this class is required to perform for an audience multiple times in the semester. By the end of the semester, students will be able to sing with accurate, consistent intonation; develop coordinated breath support to increase vocal stamina and control; and establish beneficial practice habits to help maintain vocal development.

Instrumental Studio

Instrumental Studio is for students who want one-on-one instruction and coaching in instrumental technique. In this class, students can continue to build skills on any instrument they already play, or they can opt to start fresh as a beginner on one of the following instruments: piano, ukulele, banjo, guitar, bass, drums. All students identify a primary instrument, and some may choose to work with secondary or tertiary instruments. Through a variety of teacher-selected and student-selected repertoire, students work both independently and collaboratively to develop technical and expressive skills. Each student in this class is required to perform for an audience multiple times in the semester, either as a soloist or as part of an ensemble. Students are able to choose whether they perform only for their classmates or for a wider audience at a morning meeting, coffee house, Arts Night, or other performance opportunity.

Instrumental Ensemble

Instrumental Ensemble is for students who want to play with other instrumentalists! Based on student interest and instrumentation, the ensemble may focus on a particular genre or style of music (e.g., jazz, classical, rock, pop) or split into multiple ensembles (e.g., a chamber ensemble and a jazz

combo). Sometimes the class functions like a typical director-led ensemble, with the teacher as director. Other times students take the lead on both repertoire selection and rehearsal, with the teacher serving as coach, guide, and provider of resources. Each student in this class is required to perform for an audience multiple times in the semester. By the end of the semester, students will be able to play with consistent melodic and rhythmic accuracy; follow a score, whether in standard or iconic notation; and improvise with confidence in at least one key. Depending on course registration, Instrumental Studio and Instrumental Ensemble may be combined into

In Painting & Art-isms, students develop a deeper understanding of painting techniques and build a

exercises, students develop a personalized creative process. Students then use their creative process to analyze a scene, create a character, engage with the scene's emotional content, and work to bring the script to life in performance. Experienced actors

necessary to understand these complex systems. We use Agent Based Modeling and System Dynamics to model diseases, so it is vital that students feel comfortable with applying basic algebra and graphing skills and are willing to explore multiple computer-based platforms/systems/languages.

Virgil Abloh, the Louis Vuitton Mens FW21 Show, and Transnationalism

In this two-day-a-week elective, we'll examine the legacy of Virgil Abloh through the lens of the Louis Vuitton Men's Fall/Winter 2021 show and its theme of transnationalism and migration. Architect, entrepreneur, DJ, co-founder of Off-White, Creative Director at Louis Vuitton, and first-generation American c

Senior Internship

Seniors have the option to engage in internships with local businesses, organizations, and professionals in lieu of an elective. Students select a faculty advisor to oversee their work and complete at least three hours per week of time at a job site as well as reflective assignments throughout the course.

Socrates Café

Come learn about how to set up a Socrates Café and have deep dialogues on participant-generated questions that are both timely and timeless. We'll assume that none of us is as smart as all of us, and we will work to create meaning by employing active listening, critical thinking, and tolerance for different perspectives.

SPANISH DEPARTMENT

With the geographical connection to Latin American countries, as well as the growing number of Spanish-speaking people in the United States, fluency in Spanish is essential for interaction within the Americas. The mission of the Spanish Department, therefore, is to teach students to negotiate meaning.

In this yearlong course, students are introduced to the Spanish-speaking world through its culture and language. Students learn a starter vocabulary in Spanish giving them a solid foundation for the years ahead. Students help create in-class stories to achieve this. Basic reading materials are presented on a regular basis and it is expected that students do mini-presentations about these stories. We also dedicate a good deal of time to the study of the main ancient civilizations developed in the Americas, with hands-on projects as cornerstones of the units. Throughout the year students also listen to music, dance, act, watch films, play games, and sample foods from Spanish-speaking countries. This class is conducted half in Spanish and half in English.

Spanish B

In Spanish B students are exposed to the Spanish language by listening to and creating stories in the target language. Grammar structures introduced are subject and possessive pronouns, definite and indefinite articles and verbs in the present tense as well as essential paragraph connectors. Students read short novels with high-frequency words to solidify acquisition and expand vocabulary. Active student participation is required to strengthen oral skills. Cultural pieces are woven into the lessons with a culminating project at the end of each unit. The class is conducted mainly in Spanish.

Spanish C

In Spanish

This class is taught entirely in Spanish and

faculty, embark on a variety of "encounters" From studying tidal pool ecology in Acadia National Park or exploring art museums and artists in New York City to canoe tripping through the Adirondacks, Encounter Weeks engage students with new ideas, people, and challenges, as well as develop the qualities and skills needed to work together as a group. At the beginning of the year, 6th and 9th grade students go on their own, unique trips designed to build camaraderie within the class and help all students find their place in the broader community. Later in their Vermont Commons career, older students have the opportunity to embark on leadership training and subsequently act as student leaders for future trips.

Students engage in these challenging but rewarding journeys as fully as they do any other aspect of school. And to that end, teachers

Filmmaking

Let's make movies! This Encounter Week will load up a bus full of filming gear and head off to a cabin for a week of epic cinematography. Student filmmaking crews will script, shoot and edit short films that tell wild and crazy stories. This is how every filmmaker from Quentin Tarantino to Ava DuVernay got their start! When not creating our masterpieces of film we'll be cooking sumptuous meals.

program, and they also work with elementary, middle, and high schools such as Milton, Mater Christi, and Charlotte. In addition, students also work with some adult recreational players during a night league at Edmunds Middle School.

Creative Writing in Café Culture

Many of the world's great works of creative writing have been penned in a café or a setting like it. Something about that deeply private and personal act of creating your own original work--from poetry to short stories to

The goals of this program are to encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning, to provide seniors with time to reflect on their experiences at the Vermont Commons School, and to pursue intensive study on a topic of their choosing. The Senior Projects mark a transition point for the seniors; the program allows them to creatively tie together their personal interests and academic experiences as they make the transition from high school to future pursuits.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

HEALTH

The overall goals of the Health and Wellness program are:

- 1.) To provide helpful information and resources to students
- 2.) To provide a safe space for students to share perspectives and questions with peers and facilitators
- 3.) To encourage ongoing discussions of important health and wellness topics among members of the community both at school and at home.

The Health and Wellness program aims to educate students in three broad domains: physical, mental, and sexual. Physical health includes eating, sleep habits, exercise, tobacco, vaping, drugs, and alcohol. Mental health includes mindfulness, mental disorders, coping strategies, and social dynamics. Sexual health includes puberty and body development, gender, sexuality, healthy relationships, consent, and sexual activity. Where possible, the interrelatedness of these health topics is emphasized and explored. Students are taught in groups based on age so that topics can be presented and discussed in age-appropriate ways.

Middle School

Students receive at least ten hours of health instruction each year.

High School

9th-10th grades

Students take a health class as one of their electives once during these two years.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

All middle school students take P.E. twice a week. P.E. offers a unique opportunity to learn about lifelong fitness and to engage informally with the faculty outside of the classroom. Each student chooses from a list of options. Current and past choices include Capture the Flag in the woods, strength training, yoga, neighborhood walking, pickup basketball and volleyball. Our extracurricular athletics also meet during PE time. High school students complete their P.E. requirement by

combining two of the following options: an active encounter week, a Vermont Commons sport season, and/or an outside of school physical activity taking place at least two hours per week over ten weeks. High school students must complete the above requirements three of their four years.

EXTRACURRICULAR SPORTS

The primary goal of the VCS athletic program is to foster sportsmanship, leadership, and personal growth. Student-athletes learn to balance academic responsibility with responsibility to their teammates. The team experience is open to any academically eligible VCS student. While the objective of any competition is to win, this is secondary to the primary goal of the VCS athletic program. Vermont Commons School currently fields inter-scholastic teams in the following sports: Volleyball (boys, girls, and co-ed); Cross-country (co-ed); Basketball (girls, boys); and Ultimate Frisbee (co-ed).

FACULTY AND STAFF

Katherine Bailey
Registrar, Appointed 2014
Bennington College, B.A.

Jonah Boucher
Math Instructor, Athletic Coach, Appointed 2023
Hamilton College, B.A., Harvard University, M.Ed.

Adriana Comtois
Chair, Spanish Department, Appointed 2004
Universidad Ricardo Palma, B.A., Saint Michael's College, M.A.

Char Danis
Administrative Assistant, Appointed 2024
Lesley University, B.A.

Inés de Haro
Social Studies Instructor, Appointed 2024
Champlain College, B.S., University of Vermont, M.A.

Jasmine Easter
Assistant Head of School, Appointed 2008
Ithaca College, B.A.

Peter Goff
Chair, Science Department, Volleyball Coach, Appointed 1997
Hobart College, B.S., University of Vermont, M.S.

Tim Harger
Dean of Students, Appointed 2019
Haverford College, B.A., Columbia University, M.A.

Nicole Hernandez
Spanish Instructor, Appointed 2024
University of North Carolina at Greensboro, B.A.

Ryan Houck
Chair, English Department, Appointed 2019
Cornell University, B.A., Bread Loaf School of English, M.A.

Mark Keegan
Science Instructor, Appointed 2013
Northeastern University, B.S., Cornell University, Ph.D.

Courtney Lamontagne
Learning Specialist, Appointed 2019
University of Vermont, B.A., University of Vermont M.Ed.

Dexter Mahaffey
Head of School, Appointed 2014
Middlebury College, B.A., Bread Loaf School of English, M.A., University of Louisville, Ph.D.

A. Social
Kristin Marchilena
Director of College Placement, Music Instructor, Theatre Director, Appointed 2020 202
New York University, B.A., Bank Street College of Education, English M.A.

Kathryn McDermott
Chair, Social Studies Department, Cross Country Coach, Appointed 2018
Middlebury College, B.A., Georgetown University, M.A.

Kris Mohlman
Science Applications, Mathematics Instructor, Basketball Coach, Appointed 2015
Bowdoin College, B.A. 3

Kat Nelson
Director of Admissions 2020
College

Vermont Commons School admits qualified students irrespective of race, color, religion, gender and sexual identity, national origin, or disability. All students are afforded the rights, privileges, programs and activities generally accorded or made available to our students. The school does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, gender and sexual identity, national origin, or disability in the administration of its educational programs, admission, scholarships and loans, athletics, or other school policies.