



in 1885

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**Dr. Dexter P. Mahaffey**  
**Head of School**  
**Vermont Commons School**  
**75 Green Mountain Drive**  
**South Burlington, VT 05403**

Dear Dr. Mahaffey:

Commission on Independent Schools of New England Association of Schools and Colleges met on November 7-8, 2016, reviewed the Five-Year Interim Evaluation Reports submitted by Vermont Commons School. Your report was accepted without reservation.

Vermont Commons School presented a remarkably complete Five-Year Interim Report to NEASC. The report highlights the four pillars of the school, responds directly and thoroughly to each of the major recommendations from the 2011 self-study process, and offers a roadmap leading to the next major self-study. As a school in its 20<sup>th</sup> year, it is clear that it is growing in scope and census. Significant headway in developing and enacting a strategic long-range plan is evident throughout the report.

The strengths of Vermont Commons School are expressed through the four pillars of the school. (1) Program: VCS has undertaken an audit of every facet of the curriculum, including grounding in a global curriculum, professional development opportunities, technology, collaboration with other schools and organizations, and health and wellness programming. (2) Community Connections: Vermont Commons School has moved outside of its comfortable shell to increasingly engage in community connections such as sister schools, research and service, senior projects, and senior internships. (3) Financial Stewardship and Growth: The strategic plan calls for endowment growth, compensation enhancement, increased enrollment, positive cash flow, and capital improvements. (4) Campus: A successful capital campaign in 2014 and loans contributed significantly to the improvement of campus resources such as arts facilities, STEM facilities, and recreational areas.

Major recommendations from the 2011 report are all addressed within the five-year report:

(1) Communication: Leadership changes, board involvement, and technology have all contributed to a renewed sense of collaboration, transparency, and collective decision-making. (2) Professional Development: The Professional Development Program was redesigned at the point of the two-year report to NEASC. These new programs include increased peer-to-peer observation and opportunities, an infusion of some financial support for these programs, and feedback to faculty about their teaching practices. (3) Diverse Constituency: International programs, commitment to recruitment of students from lower socio-economic strata, gender and sexual identity training, and curricular additions are evidence of VCS's actions to create a more diverse, multicultural, inclusive, and equitable community. To date, the school has not hired a

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**diversity practitioner. (4) Decision-Making: Vermont Commons' five-year report describes its emergence from its adolescent state to its adulthood as a twenty-year old school. As it has moved from the pioneering stage to the maturity stage, confidence in a shared decision-making model has gained traction. (5) Health and Wellness: As a response to this major recommendation, there is now a full-time school counselor. The counselor collaborates with the dean of students regularly, and the health education has been bolstered in many areas; there is now a health and wellness retreat day that is more successful in engaging the student in the discussions.**

Vermont Commons School appears to be poised for the next self-study in 2021. The school will do well to follow the recommendations it has made for itself in the five-year interim report. The candor of the report, along with specific objectives presented by the school, provide a plan for continuing emergence as a mature school that has moved beyond its first two decades.

Other than routine annual reports, the next major responsibility regarding accreditation will be the decennial evaluation visit scheduled for 2021.

On behalf of the Commission, I extend particular congratulations to the Vermont Commons School for a successful transition of leadership. Perhaps being in the state of transition enabled the school community to embrace the NEASC's major recommendations without hesitation. The five-year report promotes the letter and spirit of the NEASC accreditation process.

Sincerely,



Jay S. Stroud  
Interim Director of the Commission

JSS:aao

cc: Brian Leffler, Chair of the Board  
Vermont Agency of Education