



Student & Parent Handbook

2014-2015

I. Office/Operational Information

School Address and Phone Numbers:

Valley Charter School
9229 Haskell Avenue
North Hills, CA 91343

Office: 818-830-7562

Fax: 818-830-7672

Campus Hours

8:30 a.m. – 3:10 p.m., Mon/Tues/Wed/Fri

8:30 a.m. – 1:15 p.m., Thurs and ALL minimum days

Office Hours

The school office is open between 8:00 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. on school days only.

VCMS Faculty and Staff

Robert Burke, Executive Director

Matthew Rubin, Principal

Jessica Aguirre, Office Manager

Ayllin Palomino, Office Assistant

Teachers:

Felice Amisola, resource

Neele Burns, resource

Damian Coleman, math

Desiree Fedalen, science

Bryan Howell, language arts

Norma Quintanilla, Spanish

Cristin Lettich, language arts/ social studies

Nate Ruland, PE

Brenda Sadeghi, math/science

Kevin Waterman, social studies

II. Welcome to Valley Charter Middle School!

Valley Charter Middle School (VCMS) is a parent-initiated, tuition-free and non-sectarian public middle school. We offer a project- and inquiry-based, experienced-centered curriculum to serve our culturally rich and diverse population of students. By law, admission is determined by annual Public Random Drawing (lottery), and is open to all children in California.

III. Our Purpose

Our Mission Statement

The mission of Valley Charter Middle School is to provide a holistic and exceptional education to a diverse student body. We seek to prepare students to be the leaders of

tomorrow by cultivating their intellectual curiosity, collaborative spirit, respect for others, and critical thinking skills.

We fulfill this mission by:

- Providing a constructivist, inquiry-based learning environment in which teachers guide students through active learning processes that develop conceptual understanding as well as self-knowledge.
- Implementing a project-based curriculum that develops academic, interpersonal, intrapersonal skills. Our program develops students who are creative and critical thinkers, who are unafraid to question, challenge, and express themselves. We prepare students to lead and to serve the greater good as members of a democratic society and as citizens of our growing global community
- Giving faculty time, resources, autonomy and a collaborative atmosphere to continually develop their skills while creating, evaluating and refining curricula by reflecting on the learning of their students.
- Communicating regularly with students' families, seeking family involvement in the life of the school, and continually reaching out to all families in the neighborhood to ensure a diverse and inclusive learning community.

Our Pedagogical Practices

Current research shows that a constructivist approach to teaching and learning develops deep and long-lasting conceptual understanding in students. When coupled with data driven instruction and problem-based lessons, constructivism is even more effective. We, therefore, embrace these three practices fully. Teachers continually assess each student's progress through observation, interaction, and testing, and then design lessons in response to student needs. Similarly, teachers will assess their own pedagogy's effectiveness in promoting student learning.

IV. Assessment and Homework

Assessment

Teachers use a variety of assessments to measure student progress and guide instruction, including:

- school/teacher created assessments and rubrics;
- published academic assessments;
- teacher observations, student conferences, and anecdotal records.

Teachers share student progress with parents informally in conversations, phone calls, and email, and formally four times a year in progress reports, report cards, and student-led conferences.

Standardized Testing

Smarter Balanced

The School is dedicated to documenting student achievement of the common core standards each year through state-mandated pupil assessments. As is required by the California Department of Education Code students will participate in the Smarter Balanced test, and all

other mandated accountability programs (CELDT, etc.). Through these assessments, VCMS shall demonstrate student mastery of common core standards. Standardized assessments allow us to compare our students' performance with the rest of the state.

VCMS considers standardized test scores to provide a limited, but important, window into the achievement levels of students. Data from tests will be utilized to inform teaching and learning and will be acknowledged to represent a lesser part of the whole picture of student growth, development, and learning.

Homework Policy

We believe that the purpose of homework is to help children deepen their understanding of concepts learned in class and to sharpen skills which require repeated practice in order to master. The amount and type of homework given will vary based on a number of factors, including age, learning needs, content, and skill. Unless specified, students will be expected to complete homework independently. Although parents or guardians may monitor or assist with homework, it is the student who must assume responsibility for attempting and completing each assignment and remembering to return it to school.

- Homework is due on the specified due date. If absent, students get one extra day for each day absent.
- If students are confused about a homework assignment, they are encouraged to email their teacher.
- Students should check with teachers about their late work policy.
- Students are encouraged to stay after school for assistance with homework.
- Students are responsible for making up work, including tests and quizzes, when they are absent. Students should check with their teachers about missed work.

V. Beyond the School Day

After School Program

Our after school program is offered daily until 6:00 p.m. Students will have a variety of exciting after-school classes to choose from. More information about the after school program is available in the school office.

VI. Enrollment

By law, admission at VCMS is based on a random public drawing and all students wishing to enroll in the school must enter the lottery. Per our charter, admission is open to all students in the State and priority is given to siblings of existing students and a small number of children of school faculty and founding parents (not to exceed 10%).

VII. Meals

Lunch is expected to cost \$4 per meal, and is offered Monday through Friday. Menus will be available on line, and all ordering will be done online. All families are required to complete an application for free and reduced lunch, regardless of whether you think you qualify for this program. Please see the school office for more information about school lunch. We encourage children to bring their own water containers, especially on hot days.

Snacks

Children are encouraged to bring healthy snacks to school such as fruits and/or vegetables. We discourage foods that contain sugar, MSG, and other additives. **Do not send carbonated beverages or candy.**

Birthday Celebration Policy

As a community, we care about each other, and enjoy celebrating special events such as birthdays. Each student's birthday will be celebrated during a community meeting. If students wish to bring in food items for their advisory class, please be sure to bring enough for the entire class (32 students).

VIII. Our Community

We believe that every child is a unique individual and wants to learn. We are committed to providing a program that promotes educational excellence in a humanistic, nurturing and challenging environment. To assist each student in achieving his or her highest potential for intellectual and social growth, we recognize that the home and school must work together, recognizing and agreeing upon each party's responsibilities in the learning process.

Parents/guardians are responsible for:

- Providing a regular time, a quiet, well-lit place, and supervision for homework.
- Making sure their child gets to school on time and has had healthy foods to eat and adequate sleep.
- Attending two student-led conferences that are scheduled each year, as well as any other meetings that may be needed.
- Volunteering and participating at school, in their child's classroom, or at school events
- Reading and responding to all home-school communications promptly.
- Monitoring attendance and only keeping their child home when they are ill or have an emergency
- Notifying the teachers if there is something happening in their child's life that could affect his/her progress in school.
- Demonstrating respect for all students and adults at school.

Students are responsible for:

- Demonstrating respect for and cooperating with all adults at school.
- Treating classmates and schoolmates with respect in the classroom and on the yard.
- Being in class on time and prepared to do their work.
- Completing all assignments, both in class and at home, to the best of their ability.
- Following all school rules and behavior codes. This includes no fighting, threatening, or bullying.
- Accepting responsibility for their choices.
- Doing their part to be sure our school is a place where people feel safe and supported in the learning process.
- Delivering all home-school communications promptly.
- Treating our school environment with respect, including picking up trash and keeping areas clean.
- Reading at home every night.

Teachers are responsible for:

- Demonstrating respect for all students and adults at school
- Communicating frequently to families about what is happening in the classroom and discussing ways they can help support student learning at home.
- Scheduling student-led conferences twice a year to discuss student achievement, as well as other meetings as needed.
- Providing opportunities for parents/guardians to volunteer, observe, and participate in classroom activities, as appropriate.
- Providing a safe, humanistic, nurturing, and challenging environment for students.
- Explaining and modeling assignments so that students have a clear understanding of what they are learning and what is expected of them.
- Supplying clear evaluations of student progress to students and parents/guardians.
- Notifying parents/guardians of any concerns or problems in a timely manner.
- Providing for two-way communication between classroom and home so that parents/guardians have reasonable access to discuss matters relating to their child.

Administrators are responsible for:

- Demonstrating respect for all students and adults at school
- Ensuring that our school provides high-quality curriculum and instruction in a safe, humanistic, nurturing, and challenging environment that enables all students to succeed.
- Providing for two-way communication between classroom and home so that parents/guardians have reasonable access to discuss matters relating to their child.
- Creating a welcoming environment for students, families, and community members.
- Ensuring that students whose behavior violates the school's code of conduct receive appropriate consequences.
- Communicating the school's mission, goals and policies to students and families.
- Providing and participating in a process for ongoing planning, reviewing and improving school activities and programs.
- Acting as the instructional leader by supporting teachers in their classrooms.
- Providing appropriate training and workshops for teachers and parents/guardians.
- Responding in a timely manner to feedback from students, families, and staff.
- Communicating with parents/guardians about school activities and ways they can support their child's learning.

Community Awareness

We must be respectful of our neighbors. We want to preserve a good relationship within the community and model cooperative citizenship for our students. Showing courtesy and respect to our neighbors is important in maintaining positive ongoing relationships. Parental behavior also serves as a model for our students. Please be respectful of the neighbors' driveways when parking on the street.

Classroom Visits

Teachers will coordinate volunteer opportunities based on classroom needs. If you would like to observe your child in the classroom, please contact the principal first, and do not drop in unannounced.

Parent Participation Philosophy

Parent volunteerism a key to the success of any school, but especially important at VCMS, where our charter specifies that parents will volunteer at the school. Our goal is for 100% of parents to volunteer 50 hours each school year. Parent volunteers:

- Develop community involvement and interaction, which is essential to the quality of our school program
- Keep our operational costs down
- Enable our school to function well in day-to-day routines
- Enable us to successfully plan events that raise money to support our school and build school and community involvement
- Enable us to apply for grants, as parent participation is a key element in most grant applications

Volunteer opportunities include assisting during lunch, on field trips, or during special school events. We also encourage parents to check with their child's teachers if they are interested in volunteering in the classroom. Parents who would like to volunteer, but are unable during the school day, may be able to help with after school and weekend events.

Important! Please Note:

- **Volunteers who regularly work directly with students or who drive students on field trips must go through the Livescan process (fingerprinting) and have a current (within four years) negative TB/Mantoux test on file in the office.**
- **Parents who are working in the classroom are expected to keep confidential any observations and opinions about students and staff in the class. Parents can only discuss their own child's progress with teachers and administrators. Any parent who is found to be breaching student confidentiality and disregarding this expectation will no longer have the privilege of working the classroom. Please follow the classroom teacher's directions when working with students.**

IX. Fundraising

Why Do We Fundraise?

Fundraising is a part of life in California schools – public and private. Unless something radically changes in Sacramento, our public schools will continue to be under-funded.

It is possible to run a school on state funds, but for us it would mean *no* possibility of enrichment during the school day, such as electives, no teaching assistants in the classroom, and limiting many of the other programs that are necessary, we believe, for a child's growth and academic achievement. In order to continue these programs, we must fundraise to make up the difference between what it costs to educate a child at VCMS and state and local revenue. It is important to remember that no child will receive more or less based on his or her family's ability to contribute. Rather, we ask that everyone give at his or her comfort level. The important thing is for everyone to understand the need – and for all of us to get involved.

VCMS Fundraising Facts

Your contribution to Valley Charter Middle School is not only an investment in our children's future, but it's also an investment in the here and now. With your donation, we'll be able to preserve the things we value most about VCMS:

Small class sizes: VCMS class size is an average of 32 students while comparable LAUSD schools have 35-45 students.

Exceptional teachers: While many schools were laying off teachers and eliminating professional development, we continued to make the retention and professional development of top educators a top priority.

Teacher assistants: Every class has a highly qualified teaching assistant. LAUSD is currently funding NO aides except for special education assistants.

Enrichment programs: While other area schools have been forced to slash "non-essential" programs, we strive to offer our students physical education, and enriching experiences embedded within the curriculum.

Diversity: In keeping with our core mission, we strive to be one of the most culturally and socioeconomically diverse schools in Los Angeles.

OUR CHALLENGES:

If it seems like we're always fundraising, that's because WE ARE! Our state's inadequate funding for charter schools means our school's survival depends on it.

Only 70% of the funding we need to operate programs we know are best for students comes from the city, state and federal governments so we must account for the difference.

OUR GOALS:

Our main 2014-2015 Fundraising goal is for all families to participate! We encourage every family to give what they can, considering the importance of VCMS in their lives and the life of their child.

X. Home/School Communication

VCMS maintains a database of current information such as home address, telephone numbers, email addresses, and emergency contacts for each student. It is essential that this information be kept up-to-date so that the school can contact parents when there is a need. Each year, upon re-enrollment, parents receive a student emergency card for each child with the current information listed in the database. It is the parents' responsibility to update this form and to keep the school informed of any changes as they occur. Please contact the office with updates or changes of address, phone number, email, emergency contacts or medical information. We make every effort to provide communication in English and Spanish.

eBlast

Purpose: This is the **must-read** document from the school office. It contains important updates from the school to the parent body and will be emailed every Monday.

Note: If you are not already receiving eBlast, contact the school office to make sure your email address is correctly listed in our database.

VCMS Updates

Purpose: Time-sensitive information from the principal and the staff that cannot wait for the next issue of eBlast or deserves separate attention.

Web Site

Our website is middle.valleycharterschool.org. The site has basic information about our school and the application process, as well as useful tools such as the school calendar and important news. Additionally, you can link to websites maintained by your child's teacher, which include homework and other special announcements.

Contacting Your Child During the School Day

You may reach your child during the school day in emergencies only as we do not want to disrupt classroom lessons unnecessarily. Call the office and we will relay the message. Children will not be permitted to use cell phones at school or to call home on a casual basis.

Contacting Your Child's Teachers

Email is the most efficient way to contact teachers. Email addresses for all VCMS staff are first initial last name @valleycharterschool.org. For example, John Smith would be jsmith@valleycharterschool.org. If you wish to contact your child's teacher by phone, please call the office. The office will make every effort to deliver your message in a timely manner.

Parent/ Faculty Summit

These meetings will be held monthly. They serve as an opportunity to hear about upcoming events from the principal, hear a report from the executive director, and hear about the work of parent committees. They are also a great opportunity to ask questions of the school's administration.

Special Meetings and Events

Parents will be informed about meetings and events in a variety of ways, depending on the event. Most information is conveyed through eBlast or VCMS Updates (see descriptions above). Some will be posted on the VCMS website. Parents who do not have Internet access will be notified by phone, regular mail or flyer.

Board of Directors Meetings

The BOD is the body responsible for the fiscal security of the school to assure its longevity and quality. The BOD provides the oversight to make sure the mission of the school drives decision-making. The BOD hires and oversees the key school administrators who run the day-to-day operations of the school. Meetings of the Board of Directors are open to the public, and meeting dates, times, and locations will be publicized.

XI. Attendance and Tardy Policies

School attendance is vital to student achievement. Students who develop patterns of good attendance are much more likely to be successful academically, socially, and in the workplace. **On-time, daily attendance is expected of each and every student at Valley Charter Middle School.**

At Valley Charter Middle, we view every instructional day as an essential learning opportunity and missing school regularly is detrimental to a child's learning and creates poor work habits. The school day at VCMS is full of interactive, hands-on learning experiences. Working together also teaches children about social interaction and group interdependence in all areas of curriculum. Although children can make-up their class work when they are absent, they may miss out on special class experiences such as performances, science labs, social connections and group work. Treating your child's school attendance and responsibilities as your child's "job," is preparation for taking on adult responsibility later in life.

On the business/budget side, the school loses approximately \$35 a day in funding for each student absence (excused or unexcused). To put this in perspective, if students missed approximately 8 days of school on average, that would be equivalent to a \$53,760 loss in revenue! Educating your child costs money. We hope that you will send a clear message to your child about the importance of school through supporting them in attending school consistently and on time.

Excused Absences

Although attendance is very important, there are some times when students should stay home from school. A student shall be excused from school when the absence is:

1. Due to his or her illness. When a child has a fever, symptoms of illness, or a communicable illness, the child needs to stay at home to rest and recover. Children who run a fever should be free of fever for 24 hours before returning to school.
2. Due to quarantine under the direction of a county or city health officer (PLEASE NOTE: If your child has a communicable disease, the school office must be informed so that we can notify other parents and staff).
3. For the purpose of having medical, dental, optometric, or chiropractic services rendered, when such appointments cannot be scheduled outside of school hours.
4. For the purpose of attending the funeral services of a member of his or her immediate family, so long as the absence is not more than one day if the service is conducted in California and not more than three days if the service is conducted outside California.
5. Observance of a holiday or ceremony of his or her religion.

Documentation is required for all absences to help us understand why the child is not in school.

1. A note from a parent/guardian is required if your child is absent from or tardy to school for any reason.

2. If a child is absent for 3 or more consecutive days due to illness, VCMS requires a doctor's note on the first day of return indicating that your child is healthy enough to return to school.
3. If your child has a doctor's appointment during the school day, you must bring a note from the doctor to the school office.

A student may be dropped from Valley Charter School if they are absent for ten days or more and the family HAS NOT contacted the office and the parent cannot be reached

Illness

If your child is ill, please call the school in the morning. Please do your best to inform us of an absence by 8:15 a.m. on the day of the absence. If the school is not notified and the student does not report to school the next day with a note, the absence will be considered unexcused.

Tardiness

Tardiness is disruptive to the class and is difficult on your child, as he/she will have missed important beginning of the day class routines.

School begins at 8:30 a.m. each day. Students may arrive between 8:00 and 8:30 a.m. A student is considered tardy if he or she is not in his or her first class at 8:30 a.m. A student must report to the office if he or she is late for school in order to be admitted to the classroom.

Tardiness is excused only if a student has a medical, dental, or legal appointment or there has been a death in the family or a legitimate family emergency. All excused tardies require appropriate documentation. Traffic congestion is not considered a valid excuse.

If your child is frequently absent or tardy:

1. You will be notified in writing and it is expected that your child's attendance will improve immediately.
2. Should your child's attendance/tardiness not improve, you will be notified by administration and expected to attend a meeting to determine what the issues are that impact your child's attendance and what solutions may be helpful to correct the problem.
3. Should your child's attendance not show any improvement, we will be required to report excessive absences to the Student Attendance Review Board at the District Level. SARB makes the determination as to whether or not your child's attendance records will be sent to the District Attorney's office; this most likely will negatively affect a student's advancement into the next grade and may result in consequences from the DA's office.

Chronic tardiness will be handled in the same fashion as the attendance and ultimately may be reported to the Student Attendance Review Board (SARB) as described in the Attendance section above.

Withdrawal Procedures

If during the school year you decide to take your child out of VCMS, you must do so in writing. Please bring in a note indicating when your child will be leaving VCMS and where he/she will be going so that we can prepare your child's records for the next school accordingly. It is the intention of VCMS to automatically enroll all of its students into the next grade at the end of every school year. Your student will automatically be given a space at VCMS unless you indicate in writing that you will be leaving. If you are planning on leaving

VCMS, we would appreciate the courtesy of letting us know in writing as soon as you know so that we may give the opportunity to other families on the waiting list.

XII. Code of Conduct

Respect for self and others is key at VCMS. To support these goals, teachers will stress positive reinforcement for appropriate behavior. Students and staff commit to making VCMS a place where learning is a priority. To this end, the school must be safe at all times. Student actions or intentions that could violate the safety of themselves or others, or which harm our VCMS community, will result in immediate responses from teachers and/or administrators as well as notification of parents.

The staff of Valley Charter Middle School is committed to providing its students the best academic and social education possible. Because this goal can be best achieved in a safe and orderly school environment, the Student Code of Conduct has been developed to inform students of acceptable and appropriate behavior within the school community.

VCMS STUDENTS WILL CONDUCT THEMSELVES AS FOLLOWS:

1. Be responsible and attend all assigned classes each day. Arrive on time, with the necessary materials and/or books, and be prepared for class. When absent provide valid excuse signed by a Parent/Guardian.
2. Remain on campus at all times unless officially released by the VCMS office.
3. Show respect for all persons (their physical being, gender, property, opinions, and their culture)
4. Should disputes occur, work with teachers and the principal in order to resolve such differences.
5. Be responsible for all actions, and be willing to accept the consequences for these actions

Specific examples of behaviors that violate the expectations for our community include, but are not limited to:

- Verbal abuse of others (using profanity, insults, etc.)
- Intentionally hurting another person
- Not following teacher/ staff directions
- Leaving school property during the school day (unless picked up by parent/ guardian)
- Excessive rough-housing during school activities; and
- Threatening the physical or emotional safety of others.
- Behaving in a way that is hurtful or disrespectful to other students or staff
- Stealing
- Defacing school property or the property of others
- Unauthorized use of equipment
- Inappropriate use of the Internet

All of the above items refer to the school day, before and after school, and during school activities, whether at or away from the school. Students also remain under school supervision on their way to and from school, whether on campus or not.

We attempt to resolve issues as quickly as possible. If students choose to violate the expectations of our community, the following steps will generally be taken:

1. Staff gives students a warning (1st time)
2. Students complete a problem-solving sheet, preferably in class, and then be allowed to return to their normal class work. (2nd time)
3. Student will be sent to the office. Principal will work with the student on ways to correct the behavior, and will issue a consequence, including lunchtime detention or trash pick-up. Parent will be notified. (3rd time)
4. If student is habitually being sent to the office, the principal may call for a parent conference to discuss ways to correct the behavior.

Although the procedure outlined above is generally the manner in which discipline will be handled, the staff reserves the right to send student to the office immediately for severe infractions.

Dress Code

Students are expected to dress appropriately for school. A student's manner of dress must not be disruptive to the educational process in the classroom or on the campus. Therefore, the following items are prohibited: obscene, profane, gang identifiable clothing, bare midriff tops, and extremely oversized baggy pants. Students also need to wear close-toed and close-heeled shoes. Crocs, flip-flops and other summer wear are dangerous at school. Under garments should never be worn in such a way that they are obvious to other students, staff or the general public. Clothing should not restrict the students' full participation in physical activities and physical education.

Electronics Policy

Cell phones may be brought to school, but must remain off and out of sight while students are on campus. Other electronic devices may not be brought to school. If teachers or staff members see a cell phone or other electronic device out, regardless of whether it is being used, they will confiscate the device and send it to the office. For the first offense, students will be allowed to pick up their device at the end of the day. For subsequent offenses, parents will be required to pick up the device.

Student Behavior: Education Code

The Education Code enumerates safety policies that also relate to suspension and expulsion. For example, students will be recommended for suspension and may be recommended for expulsion upon a determination that the student has committed one of the acts listed below:

- Used tobacco or any products containing tobacco or nicotine products, including but not limited to cigars, cigarettes, miniature cigars, clove cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, snuff, chew packets, and betel.
- Unlawfully possessed, used, or was under the influence of any controlled substance as defined in Health and Safety Code 11053-11058, alcoholic beverage, or intoxicant of any kind.

- Unlawfully possessed or unlawfully offered, arranged, or negotiated to sell any drug paraphernalia, as defined in Health and Safety Code 11014.5.
- Disrupted school activities or otherwise willfully defied the valid authority of supervisors, teachers, administrators, other school officials, or other school personnel engaged in the performance of their duties.
- Possessed an imitation firearm, i.e., a replica of a firearm that is so substantially similar in physical properties to an existing firearm as to lead a responsible person to conclude that the replica is a firearm unless, in the case of possession of any object of the type, the student had obtained written permission to possess the item from a certified school employee, with the administrator's or designee's concurrence.
- Caused or attempted to cause damage to school property or private property.
- Stole or attempted to steal school property or private property.
- Committed an obscene act or engaged in habitual profanity or vulgarity.
- Knowingly received stolen school property or private property.
- Engaged in, or attempted to engage in, hazing as defined in Section 32050.
- Aided or abetted the infliction or attempted infliction of physical injury to another person.
- Engaged in sexual harassment as defined in Section 48900.2.
- Engaged in harassment, threats, or intimidation directed against school district personnel or pupils as defined in Section 48900.4.
- Made terrorist threats against school officials, school property or both as defined in Section 48900.7.

In terms of mandatory expulsion, federal laws state that a school must expel, for a period of not less than one year (except on a case-by-case basis), any student who is determined to have brought a firearm to school. In addition, students shall be expelled upon determination that the student has committed one of the acts listed below:

- assault or battery upon any school employee—Section 48915(a)(5)
- brandishing a knife—Section 48915(c)(2)
- causing, attempting to cause or threatening to cause serious physical injury to another person, except in self-defense—Section 48915(a)(1)
- hate violence—Section 48900.3
- possession, selling, or furnishing of a firearm—Section 48915(c)(1)
- possession of an explosive—Section 48915(c)(5)
- robbery or extortion—Section 48915(a)(4)
- offering, negotiating a sale or selling a controlled substance—Section 48915(c)(3)
- committed or attempted to commit sexual assault or committing a sexual battery (as defined in Section 48900)—Section 48915(c)(4)
- harassed, threatened or intimidated a student who is a complaining witness or witness in a school disciplinary proceeding for the purpose of preventing that student from being a witness and/or retaliating against that student for being a witness

Per charter petition, prior to expulsion, students will be accorded due process unless the student's conduct presents an immediate threat to the health or safety of others. Incidents that may warrant student expulsion will be handled in a manner consistent with California Education Code, Section 48918. VCMS may seek the advice and guidance of, or work in conjunction with, LAUSD Pupil Services Department in accordance with District policy for handling expulsion recommendations.

XIII. Safety

Drop-off and Pick-up Procedures

To ensure the safety of all students as they enter and exit VCMS each day, the following guidelines are necessary. The guidelines listed below will help to eliminate potential accidents, as well as unsafe crossing.

1. Students should be dropped-off only on the side of the street closest to the parking lot. They should not cross the street, which places them in a dangerous situation of crossing in front of other cars.
2. Drivers are asked to drive slowly and carefully through the drop-off area. Safety at all times is crucial! Please do not talk on your cell phone while dropping off or picking up your child. Always be aware of pedestrians.
3. Students can be dropped off starting at 8:00, and parents are encouraged to drop their child off early to avoid the congestion just before the start of school.

Visitors to School Campus

All school visitors, including school volunteers must have the consent and approval of the principal or his designee. Parents wishing to speak with teachers must arrange appointments. Children who are not enrolled at the school are not to be on the campus unless prior approval of the principal has been obtained. Visitors may not interfere, disrupt or cause substantial disorder in any classroom or school activity.

Visitors are expected to:

- Sign in and get a visitor's badge upon arrival at the site
- Enter and leave the classroom as quietly as possible
- Not converse with the students, teacher and/or instructional aides during the instructional time except as directed by the teacher
- Follow the school's established procedures for meeting with the teacher and/or principal after the visit, if needed
- Sign out in the office before leaving the campus.

Any individual who disrupts a school site or fails to follow school rules and/or procedures is subject to removal from the school site and may be further restricted from visiting the school. Classroom or campus volunteers will be required to sign a volunteer code of conduct.

Leaving Campus

No child is permitted to leave the VCMS campus at any time during the school day unless they have permission from the office and are accompanied by an authorized adult. Children will only be released to parents and others who have been designated on the emergency card. If you are picking up your child during the school day, you **must** sign him/her out in the office before taking him/her from the classroom.

Lost and Found

For lost and found items, see the school's office. Unmarked articles will be donated at the end of each month.

XIV. Health

Illness Policy

We wish to keep all children healthy. Please keep your child at home if he/she shows any signs of illness. The school will send a student home when it appears necessary. Children will not be admitted to school or be allowed to stay if they have a fever of 100 degrees or more, diarrhea, vomiting, lice or nits, excessively runny noses, serious coughs or infectious illnesses. Children should be free of symptoms for 24 hours before returning to school. Children who are determined to be ill by staff will receive attention and rest in the office until a parent or guardian can pick them up.

Immunizations

All students who enroll for the first time must show a written report a Mantoux (PPD) test, to show that they are free of tuberculosis. Children must also have the following immunizations: polio (four shots), DPT (five shots), MMR (two shots), hepatitis B (three shots). The office will review all immunization, and children who do not meet state requirements will be excluded from school until these requirements are met. Documentation from a physician is required for all waived immunization requirements. Note: The state of California requires all students in grades 7 through 12 to show proof of immunization (Tdap) against Whooping Cough (pertussis).

Medication

Children may only receive medication during school hours with a written request from the parent/guardian and from the physician who is responsible for the medical management of the child. Parents are urged, however, to request that the physician develop a schedule in which taking medication in school is minimized or eliminated. Requests should be processed through the office.

All medications must be stored at school in the original prescription bottle, labeled with dosage instructions, and be administered in the office. No student may carry his or her own medication or take medication unsupervised except in the case of an inhaler where the doctor has given permission.

If your child takes medication regularly during non-school hours, you should leave a short-term supply in the office to be used in case of an emergency, such as an earthquake. Please fill out the Medication Request Form and label it in red "For Emergency Use Only." Record expiration dates and replace prescriptions as needed.

Injuries

If your child sustains any type of major injury (e.g., a broken bone), a note from your doctor is required before your child may return to school. Students needing any supportive appliances (crutches, cast, wheelchair, etc.) must also have a written order from the prescribing physician. Children with casts and splints are not allowed to participate in physical education or playground activities, but alternative activities are arranged until the cast or splint is removed. Please contact the office to make specific plans for your child's participation in school activities.

Lice

Children with head lice are excluded from school until all nits/eggs are removed. Upon return to school, please bring your child to the office to be checked for lice for clearance to return to class.

If you suspect your child of having head lice or you detect lice, please inform the school office right away so all other children in the school can be checked.

XV. Emergency Procedures

To ensure the safety of all VCMS students and staff, the following procedures are implemented in case of an emergency:

If Emergency Occurs During Class Time:

If the Emergency is a **fire**, classroom teachers will escort their students to the Emergency Assembly Area (the parking lot).

In case of an **earthquake**, teachers will instruct students to drop/cover until the shaking stops, before evacuating students to the Emergency Assembly Area. Teachers or assigned staff will join each class and continue with emergency procedures. Staff without an assigned class will report to the Incident Command Center.

If the Emergency is a **lockdown**, teachers will lock doors, close blinds, and move everyone away from windows. Teachers will remain indoors with students until an all-clear announcement is made.

If Emergency Occurs When Students Are Not in the Classroom:

If an emergency occurs before school, after school, or during lunch teachers and staff will meet students in the courtyard. If a **lockdown** occurs, teachers will escort students back to classrooms to secure doors as quickly as possible. If an **earthquake** occurs, students will be directed to drop and cover their heads. Staff will direct students to line up in their assigned areas or lead them to Emergency Assembly Area if necessary. Teachers or assigned staff will join each class and continue with emergency procedures. Staff without an assigned class will report to the Incident Command Center.

Emergency Drills

Emergency drills are performed monthly. Emergency drills include, fire drills, earthquake drills, and lock-down drills.

Classrooms have an “emergency kit” stocked with first-aid equipment and water. There will be a single, designated safe place in case of a disaster or emergency where parents may pick up their children. *If this were to occur, it will be necessary for parents to show proof of identification.* **Also, it is very important to keep your child’s emergency contact information updated at all times.** Please contact the school site for more assistance.

XVI. Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act

Many of VCMS’s employees work directly with children and they are in a position to detect instances of child abuse and neglect. The Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act (“CANRA”) places certain responsibilities on the following individuals who work with children with respect to reporting child abuse and neglect: teachers; instructional aides; teachers’

assistants or aides; administrators of private or public day camps; administrators or employees of public or private youth centers, youth recreation programs or youth organizations; and administrators or employees of public or private organizations who have direct contact and supervision of children. All of those individuals are considered to be “mandated reporters” under CANRA. Mandated reporters do not investigate suspected incidents of child abuse, they simply are required to report.

Any mandated reporter who has knowledge of or observes a child, in his or her professional capacity or within the scope of his or her employment, which he or she knows or reasonably suspects has been the victim of child abuse or neglect must report such suspected incident or abuse. The child abuse is not limited to physical abuse, but also includes emotional damage that the child may evidence by the following behaviors: severe anxiety; depression; withdrawal or aggressive behavior toward self or others; and/or mental abuse.

XVII. Complaint Policy/Resolving Conflict

As a community of respect, adult strategies of conflict resolution are models for our children. Gossip is detrimental and often leads to misinformation as well as escalation of issues that can be readily, promptly and effectively resolved. Please go to the source if you have a concern. If need be, first collect your thoughts by talking to a family member or friend outside of the VCMS community.

The following tips are helpful in resolving concerns constructively:

- If the concern involves a teacher or other staff member, begin there. Choose a time/place when the conversation can be private.
- If the two of you cannot resolve the problem, go to the principal.
- If the problem is with the principal, begin there.
- If the problem is with the principal and you have discussed it with him first and not come to a resolution, you may take the issue to the executive director.
- If the problem is with the executive director and you have discussed it with him first and not come to a resolution, you may take it to the Board President by filling out a grievance form. Forms are available in the main office.

GENERAL COMPLAINTS POLICY Valley Charter Schools (“Charter School”) has adopted this General Complaint Policy to address concerns about the Charter School generally or regarding specific employees. For complaints regarding harassment or perceived violations of state or federal laws, please refer to the Charter School’s Policy Against Unlawful Harassment and/or the Charter School’s Uniform Complaint Procedures. For all other complaints, the General Complaint form and accompanying procedures will be appropriate.

INTERNAL COMPLAINTS (Complaints by Employees against Employees) This section of the policy is for use when a Charter School employee raises a complaint or concern about a co-worker.

If reasonably possible, internal complaints should be resolved at the lowest possible level, including attempts to discuss/resolve concerns with the immediate supervisor. However, in the event an informal resolution may not be achieved or is not appropriate, the following steps will be followed by the Executive Director or designee:

3. The complainant will bring the matter to the attention of the Executive Director as soon as possible after attempts to resolve the complaint with the immediate supervisor have failed or if not appropriate; and
4. The complainant will reduce his or her complaint to writing, indicating all known and relevant facts. The Executive Director or designee will then investigate the facts and provide a solution or explanation;
5. If the complaint is about the Executive Director, the complainant may file his or her complaint in a signed writing to the Chair of the Board of Directors of the Charter School, who will then confer with the Board and may conduct a fact-finding or authorize a third party investigator on behalf of the Board. The Chair or investigator will report his or her findings to the Board for review and action, if necessary.

This policy cannot guarantee that every problem will be resolved to the employee's satisfaction. However, the Charter School values each employee's ability to express concerns and the need for resolution without fear of adverse consequence to employment.

POLICY FOR COMPLAINTS GENERALLY

(General Complaints and Complaints by Third Parties against Employees)

This section of the policy is for use when either a complaint does not fall under other complaint procedures or a third party (non-employee) raises a complaint or concern about the Charter School generally, or a Charter School employee.

If complaints cannot be resolved informally, complainants may file a written complaint with the office of the Executive Director or Board President (only if the complaint concerns the Executive Director) as soon as possible after the events that give rise to the complainant's concerns. The written complaint should set forth in detail the factual basis for the complaint.

In processing the complaint, Executive Director (or designee) shall abide by the following process:

1. The Executive Director or designee shall use his or her best efforts to ascertain the facts relating to the complaint. Where applicable, the Executive Director or designee shall talk with the parties identified in the complaint or persons with knowledge of the particulars of the complaint to ascertain said facts.
2. In the event that the Executive Director (or designee) finds that a complaint is valid, the Director (or designee) may take appropriate action to resolve the problem. Where the complaint is against an employee of the Charter School, the Executive Director may take disciplinary action against the employee. As appropriate, the Executive Director (or designee) may also simply counsel/reprimand employees as to their conduct without initiating formal disciplinary measures.
3. The Executive Director's (or designee's) decision relating to the complaint shall be final unless it is appealed to the Board of Directors of the Charter School. The decision of the Board of Directors shall be final.

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GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

1. Confidentiality: All complainants will be notified that information obtained from the complainants and thereafter gathered will be maintained in a manner as confidential as possible, but in some circumstances absolute confidentiality cannot be assured.
2. Non-Retaliation: All complainants will be advised that they will be protected against retaliation as a result of the filing of any complaints or participation in any complaint process.
3. Resolution: The Board (if a complaint is about the Executive Director) or the Executive Director or designee will investigate complaints appropriately under the circumstances and pursuant to the applicable procedures, and if necessary, take appropriate remedial measures to ensure effective resolution of any complaint.

XVIII. Legal Disclaimers

The information contained in the VCMS Handbook is provided for informational purposes only. Information may be changed or updated without notice. VCMS expressly disclaims all liability with respect to actions taken based on any content in this handbook or in any newsletter articles, eNews messages, or other communication, whether verbal or in writing. VCMS assumes no responsibility for errors or omissions in this handbook or other documents which are referenced in this handbook. VCMS does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, disability, religion, or sexual orientation.

XIX. Photo Authorization & Release Form

Throughout the coming school year, your child is going to participate in many wonderful school events and might be included in pictures taken during those events. With your permission, we'd like to make those pictures available for use in Valley Charter School media such as the school website, videos, or newsletters. Before we can do that, we need your permission.

- a. I, as a parent or guardian of the above named student, hereby authorize and grant to Valley Charter School the right to print, publish, and edit as desired photographs and recorded images of the student named herein. This authorization permits the use of the photographs and recorded image(s) in any medium or form of distribution including but not limited to audio, video, film, slide or any other electronic and print formats (known as "Recordings") for use in any Valley Charter School media purpose generated by or through the Valley Charter School administration and/or Board of Directors.
- b. I understand and agree that the use of such Recordings will be without any compensation to the pupil or the pupil's parent or guardian.
- c. I understand and agree that Valley Charter School shall have the exclusive right, title, and interest, including copyright, in the Recordings.
- d. I understand and agree that Valley Charter School shall have the unlimited right to use the recordings for any Valley Charter School media purpose.
- e. I hereby release and hold harmless Valley Charter School from any and all actions, claims, damages, costs, or expenses, including attorney's fees, brought by the pupil and/or parent or guardian which relate to or arise out of any use of these Recordings as specified above.

XX. Student Computer & Internet Use Policy

Valley Charter Schools (VCS) provide computers, networks, and Internet access to support the educational mission of the schools and to enhance the curriculum and learning opportunities for students and school staff. VCS believes that the resources available through the Internet are of significant value in the learning process and preparing students for future success. At the same time, the unregulated availability of information and communication on the Internet requires that schools establish reasonable controls for lawful, efficient, and appropriate use of this technology.

Student use of school computers, networks, and Internet services is a privilege, not a right. Students are required to comply with this policy and the accompanying rules. Students who violate the policy and/or rules may have their computer privileges revoked and may also be subject to further disciplinary and/or legal action.

All VCS computers remain under the control, custody, and supervision of the school. The school reserves the right to monitor all computer and Internet activity by students. Students

have no expectation of privacy in their use of school computers.

While reasonable precautions will be taken to supervise student use of the Internet, VCS cannot reasonably prevent all inappropriate uses, including access to objectionable materials and communication with persons outside of the school in violation of policies/procedures and school rules. The school is not responsible for the accuracy or quality of information that students obtain through the Internet.

Before a student is allowed to use school computers and Internet services, the student and the student's parent/guardian must sign and return the Computer/Internet Access Acknowledgment. The school will retain the signed acknowledgment.

The Executive Director shall be responsible for overseeing the implementation of this policy and the accompanying rules, and for advising the school of the need for any future amendments or revisions to the policy/rules. The Executive Director may also develop additional administrative procedures/rules governing the day-to-day management and operations of the school's computers.

STUDENT COMPUTER AND INTERNET USE RULES

The rules for student computer and Internet use are intended to provide general guidelines and examples of prohibited uses but do not attempt to state all required or prohibited activities by users. Failure to comply with the VCS policy and these rules may result in loss of computer and Internet access privileges, disciplinary action and/or legal action.

A. Computer Use is a Privilege, Not a Right

Student use of the school's computers, networks, and Internet services is a privilege, not a right. Unacceptable use/activity may result in suspension or cancellation of privileges as well as additional disciplinary and/or legal action.

The school principal shall have final authority to decide whether a student's privileges will be denied or revoked.

B. Acceptable Use

Student access to the school's computers, networks, and Internet services are provided for educational purposes and research consistent with the school's educational mission, curriculum, and instructional goals. Students are further expected to comply with these rules and all specific instructions from the teacher or other supervising staff member/volunteer when accessing the school's computers, networks, and Internet services.

C. Prohibited Use

The user is responsible for his/her actions and activities involving school computers, network, and Internet services and for his/her computer files, passwords, and accounts. Examples of unacceptable uses that are expressly prohibited include, but are not limited to the following:

1. Accessing Inappropriate Materials – Accessing, submitting, posting, publishing, forwarding, downloading, scanning, or displaying materials that are defamatory, abusive, obscene, vulgar, sexually explicit, sexually suggestive, threatening, discriminatory, harassing and/or illegal;
2. Illegal Activities – Using the school's computers, networks, and Internet services for any illegal activity or activity that violates other policies, procedures and/or school rules;
3. Violating Copyrights – Copying or downloading copyrighted materials without the owner's

permission;

4. Plagiarism – Representing as one’s own work any materials obtained on the Internet (such as term papers, articles, etc.). When Internet sources are used in student work, the author, publisher, and Web site must be identified;
5. Copying Software – Copying or downloading software without the express authorization of the principal or teacher;
6. Non-School-Related Uses – Using the school’s computers, networks, and Internet services for non-school-related purpose, solicitation, or for any other personal use;
7. Misuse of Passwords/Unauthorized Access – Sharing passwords, using other users’ passwords without permission and/or accessing other users’ accounts;
8. Malicious Use/Vandalism – Any malicious use, disruption or harm to the school’s computers, networks, and Internet services, including but not limited to hacking activities and creation/uploading of computer viruses; and Unauthorized Access to Chat Rooms/News Groups – Accessing chat rooms or news groups without specific authorization from the supervising teacher.

D. No Expectation of Privacy

The school retains control, custody, and supervision of all computers, networks, and Internet services owned or leased by the school. The school reserves the right to monitor all computer and Internet activity by students. Students have no expectations of privacy in their use of school computers, including e-mail and stored files.

E. Compensation for Losses, Costs and/or Damages

The student and/or the student’s parent/guardian shall be responsible for compensating the school for any losses, costs or damages incurred by the school related to violation of these rules, including investigation of violations.

F. School Assumes No Responsibility for Unauthorized Charges, Costs, or Illegal Use

The school assumes no responsibility for any unauthorized charges made by students including but not limited to credit card charges, long distance telephone charges, equipment and line costs, or for any illegal use of its computers such as copyright violations.

G. Student Security

A student shall not reveal his/her full name, address or telephone number on the Internet without prior permission from a supervising teacher. Students should never meet people they have contacted through the Internet without parental permission. Students should inform their supervising teacher if they access information or messages that are dangerous, inappropriate, or make them uncomfortable in any way.

H. System Security

The security of the school’s computers, networks, and Internet services is a high priority. Any user who identifies a security problem must notify the teacher or principal. The user shall not demonstrate the problem to others. Any user who attempts or causes a breach of system security shall have his/her privileges revoked and may be subject to additional disciplinary and/or legal action.

I. Parental Permission Required

Students and their parent/guardian are required to sign and return the Computer/Internet Access Acknowledgment Form before being allowed to use school computers.

BELL SCHEDULE

VCMS operates on a rotating schedule, ensuring that students have their core classes at various times during the day. In addition, school is dismissed early every Thursday to allow teachers time to meet, plan, and engage in meaningful professional development.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:30-9:25: A	8:30-9:25: B	8:30-9:25: C	8:30-9:30: D	8:30-9:25: E
9:30-10:25: B	9:30-10:25: C	9:30-10:25: D	9:35-10:35: E	9:30-10:25: A
10:30 – 11:25: C	10:30 – 11:25: D	10:30 – 11:25: E	10:40 – 11:40: A	10:30 – 11:25: B
11:30 – 12:00: ZAP	11:30 – 12:00: ZAP	11:30 – 12:00: ZAP	11:40 – 12:10: Lunch	11:30 – 12:00: ZAP
12:00 – 12:30: Lunch	12:00 – 12:30: Lunch	12:00 – 12:30: Lunch	12:15 – 1:15: B	12:00 – 12:30: Lunch
12:35 – 1:30: D	12:35 – 1:30: E	12:35 – 1:30: A		12:35 – 1:30: C
1:35 – 2:25: Enrichment	1:35 – 2:25: Enrichment	1:35 – 2:25: Enrichment		1:35 – 2:25: Enrichment
2:30 – 3:10: Community Mtg.	2:30 – 3:10: Advisory	2:30 – 3:10: Council		2:30 – 3:10: Advisory

Schedule Explanations:

Sixth Grade

Periods A, B, C, D, and E refer to core classes. These classes are language arts, math, social studies, science, and Spanish. Sixth graders will take PE for two of the “enrichment” periods and will have an elective or support class for the other two.

Seventh/ Eighth Grade

Periods A, B, C, D, and E refer to core classes. These classes are language arts, math, social studies, science, and PE. Seventh and eighth graders will take either elective or academic support classes during the “enrichment” periods.

All Students

ZAP stands for “zeros aren’t permitted”. During this time, teachers will work with students on completing missing work and revising work on which a low score was earned. Students with no missing work will have the opportunity for enrichment classes during this time.

Advisory is a course designed to provide students with skills to succeed academically and socially/ emotionally. It is also a class that will focus on team building skills and goal setting.

Council is a program designed to provide students an avenue to “tell their stories” and truly listen to those around them as a member of a caring community. During this weekly time, teacher facilitators will guide small groups of students towards becoming a more cohesive unit.

Community meetings are a chance for the whole school to come together have fun, celebrate successes and special events, and discuss school-wide challenges. Sometimes, meetings may be divided up by grade level. Students are encouraged to suggest meeting topics they feel need to be addressed.

Glossary: Helpful Pedagogical and Charter Terms

Charter school: An innovative public school that is freed from some of the rules and regulations required of ordinary public schools, and held accountable for student achievement.

Constructivism: VCMS teaching model comprised of experience-centered and inquiry-based learning and based on the belief that knowledge is continually built and enriched through experience.

Experience-centered: Students are actively involved in the learning process, which may include hands-on and small group work. The work is meaningful, reflecting and broadening student experience and knowledge.

Inquiry-based: Includes use of Bloom's Taxonomy in questioning and investigating problems and ideas. Students involved in inquiry-based learning formulate and revise their ideas as new experiences, enrich and change prior knowledge.

Project-based learning: A complex curricular unit that is guided by an overarching theme and integrated throughout many disciplines. The classroom environment is an important "second teacher" as are environments and resources from outside the classroom. The focus of project-based learning is on the process of learning, not an "end product," although artifacts may be created throughout the project.

Standards-based: The given set of standards (from a school district, state or national academic agency), which forms the basis for curriculum development. Standards-based instruction is compatible with many teaching methodologies. Public schools are held accountable to standards.

Whole child/holistic approach: An "educated person" utilizes and explores many skill sets. To this end, children need the means to express and clarify learning in a variety of ways. VCMS believes in educating the "whole child" by providing a range of meaningful activities so that students can become passionate and skilled learners in many different disciplines and contexts.

STUDENT & PARENT HANDBOOK AND POLICY SIGNATURE SHEET

By signing this form and initialing each item below you acknowledge that you have read the Student & Parent Handbook, that you understand the school policies, and that you agree to follow them. Please sign and return this page to your children's advisory teacher by **Friday, September 12, 2014**.

Print:

Student First and Last Name

Signature

Print:

Parent/Guardian Name _____

Signature

STUDENT INITIALS	PARENT INITIALS	
		Homework Policy – I understand the importance of homework and have read the policy.
		Home/School Communication – I understand the importance of the school maintaining a database of current information such as home address, telephone numbers, email address, and emergency contacts for each student.
		Attendance and Tardy Policies and legal Ramifications of Truancy – I understand the importance of daily, on-time attendance. I have read and understand the California Education Codes Regarding Student Attendance.
		Student Code of Conduct – I have read and understand the expectations in Code of Conduct for all students. I have also read the Education Code policies that enumerate safety policies that relate to suspension and expulsion. I have also reviewed, understand, and will support the dress code and electronics policy. I understand that a student whose actions or behavior violates these policies, or compromises the learning environment, will be held accountable.
		Student Behavior: Education Code – I understand and support that Valley Charter is a safe zone for students and staff, and that there is zero tolerance for any object considered to be a weapon or potentially dangerous to students and staff. I also understand that students found to be in possession of, under the influence of, who intend to use, or who are negotiating the sale of an illegal substance may be expelled.
		Health – I have read, understand and support the health concerns tied to returning to school after an illness or injury, medication taken during school hours, and lice.
		Photo Authorization & Release Form – I have read and understand the Photo Authorization & Release and I agree to accept its provisions unless I have checked the box below. <input type="checkbox"/> I <u>do not</u> want photographs of my child used in any Valley Charter School media.
		Student Computer/Internet Use Acknowledgment Form I have read the Student Computer/Internet Use policy and rules. I understand that my son/daughter's use of school computers is subject to compliance with these rules. I further understand that violation of the policy or rules may result in the revocation of computer privileges and may also be subject to further disciplinary and/or legal action.