

# Voyageurs Expeditionary High School

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# STAFF HANDBOOK



## I. WHO WE ARE

### Mission Statement

The mission of Voyageurs Expeditionary High School is to prepare young people for world citizenship through expeditionary learning, community service, and the promotion of a culture of best effort, high expectation, collaboration, and intentional diversity.

### Vision Statement

Starting at a level much deeper than just curriculum, the design of Voyageurs addresses the origins of learning and the fundamental well-being of students. The foundation necessary to achieve the mission of our school is the establishment of a community of learners composed of students, families, teachers, and staff who share the conviction that the best education takes place in an intentionally developed environment that nurtures, protects, challenges, and values every member of that community.

### Employment-at-Will Statement

We firmly believe that our staff members are essential to the success of Voyageurs Expeditionary High School. This staff handbook has been developed for informational purposes only; to better help our staff members perform their jobs. It is important that every staff member of Voyageurs Expeditionary High School be familiar with and understands the policies contained in this handbook.

All staff members have an employment relationship which is known as employment-at-will. This means that you are not required to work for Voyageurs Expeditionary High School for any set period of time. Voyageurs Expeditionary High School is also not required to employ a staff member for any set period of time and is free to terminate employment at any time and for any reason, after due-process. This handbook does not modify or limit the employment-at-will relationship.

The policies and procedures described in this handbook are not intended to create, nor are they to be interpreted to create, any contract between Voyageurs Expeditionary High School and its staff. These policies and procedures may be changed at any time in the future dependent on board approval.

## Equal Opportunity in Employment Statement

Voyageurs Expeditionary High School is an Equal Opportunity Employer. It is our policy to comply with all applicable Equal Employment Opportunity laws and regulations. Therefore, recruiting, hiring, training, promotion, discipline, compensation, benefits and all other employment decisions will be made without regard to race, creed, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, actual or perceived sexual orientation, status with respect to public assistance, or other protected class status.

## Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Statement

Voyageurs Expeditionary High School believes that every employee and student has the right to an environment free from sexual or other harassment. We disapprove of and will not tolerate harassment by any supervisor, co-employee, subordinate, parent or any other individual coming into contact with the school's employees in the workplace.

### \* Sexual Harassment/Sexual Violence Defined

Sexual harassment is a form of discrimination and is prohibited by law. The Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) has defined sexual harassment as follows:

“Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct or communication of a sexual nature when:

1. submission to that conduct or communication is made a term or condition, either explicitly or implicitly, of obtaining or retaining employment, or of obtaining an education; or
2. submission to or rejection of that conduct or communication by an individual is used as a factor in decisions affecting that individual's employment or education; or
3. that conduct or communication has the purpose or effect of substantially or unreasonably interfering with an individual's employment or education, or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive employment or education environment.”

**ANY SEXUAL HARASSMENT AS DEFINED WHEN PERPETRATED ON ANY STUDENT OR EMPLOYEE BY ANY STUDENT OR EMPLOYEE WILL BE TREATED AS SEXUAL HARASSMENT UNDER THIS POLICY.**

Sexual Harassment may include, but is not limited to:

1. Verbal harassment or abuse;
2. Subtle pressure for sexual activity;
3. Inappropriate patting or pinching;
4. Intentional brushing against a student's or an employee's body;
5. Demanding sexual favors accompanied by implied or overt threats concerning an individual's employment or education status;
6. Demanding sexual favors accompanied by implied or overt promises of preferential treatment with regard to an individual's employment or education status;
7. Any sexually motivated unwelcome touching;
8. Sexual violence which is a physical act of aggression that includes a sexual act or sexual purpose.

#### \* Reporting Procedures

Any person who believes he or she has been the victim of sexual harassment or sexual violence by a student or an employee of the school or any third person, should report the alleged acts immediately to an appropriate school official as designated by this policy. The school encourages the reporting party or complainant to use the report form available from the Director or the school office.

1. **In the school building:** The Directors are responsible for receiving oral or written reports of sexual harassment or sexual violence at the building level. Upon receipt of a report, the Director must notify the School Human Rights Officer immediately without screening or investigating the report. A written report will be forwarded simultaneously to the Human Rights Officer. If the report was given verbally, the Director shall reduce it to written form within 24 hours and forward it to the Human Rights Officer. Failure to forward any sexual harassment or sexual violence report or complaint as provided herein will result in disciplinary action. If the complaint involves the Director, the complaint shall be filed directly with the School Human Rights Officer.
2. **School-wide:** The School Board will designate the Director as the School Human Rights Officer to receive reports or complaints of sexual harassment and sexual violence from any individual, employee or victim of sexual harassment or sexual violence and also from the Director as outlined above. If the complaint involves the Human Rights Officer, the complaint shall be filed directly with the School Board.
3. Submission of a complaint or report of sexual harassment or sexual violence will not affect the individual's future employment, grades or work assignments.

4. Use of formal reporting forms is not mandatory.
5. The school will respect the confidentiality of the complainant and the individual(s) against whom the complaint is filed as much as possible, consistent with the school legal obligations and the necessity to investigate allegations of sexual harassment and sexual violence and take disciplinary action when the conduct has occurred.

#### \* Investigation and Recommendation

The Human Rights Officer, upon receipt of a report or complaint alleging sexual harassment or sexual violence, shall immediately authorize an investigation. This investigation may be conducted by school officials or by a third party designated by the Director. The investigating party shall provide a written report of the status of the investigation within 10 days to the Director.

In determining whether alleged sexual conduct constitutes sexual harassment or sexual violence, the school should consider the surrounding circumstances, the nature of the sexual advances, relationships between the parties involved and the context in which the alleged incidents occurred. Whether a particular action or incident constitutes sexual harassment or sexual violence requires a determination based on all the facts and surrounding circumstances.

The investigation may consist of personal interviews with the complainant, the individual(s) against whom the complaint is filed, and others who may have knowledge of the alleged incident(s) or circumstances using methods and documents deemed pertinent by the investigator. In addition, the school may take immediate steps, at the Director's discretion, to protect the complainant, students and employees pending completion of an investigation of alleged sexual harassment or sexual violence.

The School Human Rights Officer shall make a report to the School Board upon completion of the investigation.

#### \* Reprisal

The school will discipline any individual who retaliates against any person who reports alleged sexual harassment or sexual violence, or who testifies, assists or participates in an investigation, proceeding or hearing relating to a sexual harassment or sexual violence complaint. Retaliation includes, but is not limited to, any form of intimidation, reprisal or harassment.

#### \* Right to Alternative Complaint Procedures

These procedures do not deny the right of any individual to pursue other avenues of recourse which may include filing charges with the Minnesota Department of Human Rights, initiating civil action, or seeking redress under state criminal statutes and/or federal law.

### \* Sexual Harassment or Sexual Violence as Sexual Abuse

Under certain circumstances, sexual harassment or sexual violence may constitute sexual abuse under Minn. Stat. 609.341 through 609.3451; Minn. Stat. 609.321 through 609.324; or Minn. Stat. 617.246. In such situations the school shall comply with Minn. Stat. 626.556, “Reporting of Maltreatment of Minors”.

Nothing in this policy will prohibit the school from taking immediate action to protect victims of alleged sexual abuse.

### \* Discipline

Any school action taken pursuant to this policy will be consistent with requirements of Minnesota statutes and school policies. The school will take such disciplinary action as it deems necessary and appropriate, including warning, suspension, or immediate discharge to end sexual harassment and sexual violence and prevent its recurrence.

### Drug and Smoke Free Workplace

All staff members are expected and required to report to work on time and in appropriate mental and physical condition to perform their duties. It is Voyageurs Expeditionary High School’s intent and obligation to provide a drug-free, healthful, and safe work and learning environment. As such, we provide an entirely smoke-free building.

The unlawful manufacture, distribution, dispensation possession or use of controlled substances or alcohol on school grounds or while conducting school business off school grounds is absolutely prohibited. Violations of this policy will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination, and may have legal consequences.

Voyageurs Expeditionary High School recognizes drug dependency as an illness and a major health problem. We also recognize drug abuse as a potential safety and security problem. Conscientious efforts to seek help are encouraged.

## II. ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES

### License to Teach

In compliance with NCLB all teachers at Voyageurs will be highly qualified, which means they will be licensed in the area in which they are teaching. All licenses bear the date of issue and the date of expiration. They may be renewed on or before July 1 in the year of expiration. After July 1 in the year of expiration, all licenses to teach which have not been renewed are considered expired and no longer valid for teaching. Individual teachers and staff members are responsible for the maintenance of their own licenses.

### Background Checks

Employment at Voyageurs Expeditionary High School is contingent with passing criminal background checks. All licensed teachers will be required to complete a state background check yearly in additions to the background check required to be licensed in Minnesota. All other staff of VEHS will be required to complete a state and federal background check. The cost will be covered by the school. Information regarding the process will be provided at staff orientation prior to the start of school.

### Work Day

The teacher workday for full time teachers will run from 8 am to 4 pm. Teachers will have 170 student contact days and 183 total workdays. Please refer to the school calendar for these days.

### Faculty Dress Code

All faculty and employees of the Voyageurs Expeditionary High School serve as role models for the students with whom they work. Consistent with these roles, all faculty and employees shall dress in a manner and have an appearance that is appropriate and professional in light of the environment in which they work, the duties of their jobs, and the impressionable youth they serve.

### Maltreatment of Minors

Minnesota Statute 626.556, as amended, "Reporting of Maltreatment of Minors" makes it mandatory for people working with children to report suspected neglect or physical and/or sexual abuse of children.

## Materials Used in Teaching

- A. **Keys** –Faculty are to request keys from and return keys to the Director. As a general rule, only faculty are to have keys to school building and rooms; students are not to have keys.
- B. **Checking Out Materials**—Supplies (such as textbooks, workbooks, calculators) to be checked out must be given a number. The number should be recorded when checking out to the individual student. The condition of the supply should also be noted (e.g. New / Good / Poor). At the end of the course the supply should be checked in and the condition of the supply noted.
- C. **Purchasing Materials**---The purchase of all educational materials, student service materials, and office materials should be pre-approved by the Director. The cost of any items not previously approved, but paid for by personal funds, may not be reimbursed. Cost for pre-approved items which have been paid for with personal funds should be presented for reimbursement within 30 days of the purchase, preferably by the last day of any month. Tax on items purchased is not reimbursable. Tax-exempt forms and purchase orders can be found in the office.
- D. **Fundraising**—Educational club and recreational fundraising should be coordinated with the Director. All monies should be processed through the school. With a tax-exempt status, we are responsible to account for and document all monies credited and debited through any and all organizations affiliated with VEHS.

## Student Misbehavior

Voyageurs Expeditionary High School’s policy is that staff members never strike students and that they be restrained only when there is a danger to the student, a fellow student and/or staff member or school patron. Staff members who use restraint techniques must be trained in this technique. Staff members are encouraged to seek help when they have problems with students, and to refer to the Discipline Policy in the Student/ Family Handbook.

## Safety and Health

Voyageurs Expeditionary High School considers safety to be a serious and important part of the working environment. We want the staff to make full use of all information that is provided. Safety is an ongoing, joint effort between Voyageurs Expeditionary High School and its staff. Any injury, unsafe condition or disregard of safety regulations should be reported immediately so that the necessary steps to rectify the condition can be taken.

## Severe Weather

Generally, Voyageurs Expeditionary High School will not shut down operations during severe or threatening weather conditions. However, unforeseen circumstances arise on occasion, such as power failures, fires, etc. over which Voyageurs has no control and which prevents staff from

working. The decision to close the school will be made only by the Director or a designated representative in his absence, in compliance with District 31 closings.

In the event the decision is made to officially close the school before the school day begins, every attempt will be made to notify staff members one hour prior to the start of the workday. If in doubt, please telephone your supervisor before departing for work.

In the event the school is not closed, but conditions are severe enough to prohibit a staff member from arriving at work, staff will have the option of using a designated Leave day for the time lost.

In the event the decision is made to shut down operations, which had been open during the course of the day due to threatening conditions, employees who are present will receive a regular day's compensation.

### Travel

Voyageurs Expeditionary High School will reimburse staff members at the federal rate per mile for the use of their personal vehicles while conducting pre-approved school business. Other pre-approved business travel will be by the most cost-effective method of transportation, including economy or moderate accommodations. When more than one staff member is going to the same event, staff are asked to ride together wherever possible. Meals while traveling are reimbursed at a maximum of \$30 per full day or pro-rated for partial days--- receipts are required. Reimbursement will not be allowed for alcoholic beverages.

### Performance Reviews

Voyageurs Expeditionary High School believes that individual performance should be observed and evaluated on an ongoing basis. These performance reviews will include self, peer, and director observations and evaluations. The results of these observations and evaluations will determine future employment as well as recommended professional development.

## III. BENEFITS

### Leave Days

All full-time staff members receive a total of eight days paid time off per school year to be used at the discretion of the employee. These days can be used as vacation time, sick days, funeral leave, or personal time off. All staff should give adequate notice of when leave time will be used.

Administrative staff members and staff members who are not employed for the full school year will receive a proportionate number of leave days based on actual days worked. At the end of the school year, employees may be paid for unused leave days up to five days at the substitute rate for certified staff and at the employee's regular hourly rate for other staff.

## Family Leave

Family Leave time needs to be requested two months prior to the requested date in writing to the Director for school board approval. Sick days may be used during family leave time. Family leave is limited to nine consecutive school months and will be unpaid time after sick days are used.

## Jury Duty

Voyageurs Expeditionary High School recognizes its responsibility to society includes the assurance that its staff members, when called upon, may fulfill their civic obligation to serve on jury duty. All staff members will be excused from work for the amount of time required to serve the jury term without interruption of benefits. In order that a staff member is not financially penalized as a result of serving jury duty, Voyageurs Expeditionary High School will pay the difference between what you receive as jury pay (excluding travel or per diem expenses) and your regular rate of pay as an employee.

Upon receipt of a summons to serve jury duty, staff members are required to present a copy to the Director in advance of the jury date. Staff members are also required to obtain and submit daily/weekly statements from the court verifying attendance. Where the distance is reasonable, staff members serving jury duty are expected to return to work when they are temporarily excused from jury duty. Otherwise, staff members are expected to return to work immediately upon release.

## Insurance

Voyageurs Expeditionary High School currently provides a variety of insurance benefits for eligible full-time employees, including major medical and hospitalization. Dependent coverage is also available for these programs. The eligibility requirements vary, and staff members share the cost of some of these programs. Please review the summary plan description for additional information.

## Government Benefits

Voyageurs Expeditionary High School also contributes to certain government programs on the behalf of all staff members, such as Social Security, Unemployment Insurance, TRA and Worker's Compensation Insurance. Social Security coverage is maintained through deducting one-half of the required contribution from your paycheck, with the remaining one-half paid by Voyageurs Expeditionary High School. Any questions concerning paychecks or deductions should be discussed with the Business Manager.

## IV. WORKING RULES AND ORGANIZATIONAL STANDARDS

The orderly and efficient operation of Voyageurs Expeditionary High School requires that all staff members maintain discipline and proper personal standards of conduct at all times. Staff members, who violate rules, policies, or practices, will be subject to disciplinary action.

### Communication Model & Problem Solving Procedure

Communication Model: The ultimate purpose of a communication model is to encourage the growth and development of Voyageurs as a healthy community. Dealing with conflict is a part of any development or growth process and may arise in any community. An effective problem solving and conflict resolution process is therefore an essential component of the communication model.

The Problem Solving and Conflict Resolution Procedure is a model for all members of the Voyageurs community and is designed to address issues among the following: Between parents and staff, parents and administration, staff and administration, and staff and staff.

Four Major Areas of Communication: Conflicts may fall into one of four major areas (or may be a combination of these areas) as listed below.

#### 1. Policy and Legal Issues

Current policies are available in the school office. Reviewing policies lends information that may at times solve a conflict. The Board at Voyageurs has final approval on all governance issues. Issues of policy should be addressed directly to the Voyageurs Expeditionary High School Board.

#### 2. Procedures/Daily Operations

The director shall establish procedures designed to carry out the policies adopted by the Board. Procedures pertain to anything regarding the daily operations of Voyageurs. An office staff member or the director can clarify procedures. The director serves as the primary administrator of the school. Any daily operations/procedural issues should be addressed directly to the director.

#### 3. Pedagogy

Pedagogical issues pertain to anything that occurs in the classroom, i.e. teaching, curriculum, classroom management, or teacher-student relationships. Pedagogical issues should be addressed directly to the class teacher.

#### 4. Interpersonal Communication and Relationships

Concerns between people or communication breakdown should be directly communicated with the person(s) involved. In addition, communication and relationship issues can surface in conjunction with policy and procedural issues or pedagogical issues.

*The overall purpose of this procedure is to perpetuate a climate of collegiality, mutual trust and respect by resolving differences in a timely, objective, and equitable manner.*

If concerns or conflicts regarding policies and procedures, pedagogy, and or community members are not resolved after following the procedures described under “Four Major Areas of Communication”, direct communication lines should be employed.

These communication lines are the vehicles that Voyageurs uses to resolve conflict within our community as they arise. These pathways form a structure and process that encourage parties involved in a conflict to reach resolution. *It is emphasized that the first step in resolution of conflicts in our community is direct communication with the involved parties.* The following steps should then be initiated if issues are not resolved.

### Problem Solving Procedures:

Goals: 1. Provide for effective handling of issues; 2. Provide a clear process to those who believe they have not been accorded a reasonable interpretation of their rights under current school policies.

Step 1: Direct Resolution: If staff/community members/parents have a question or concern, they are encouraged to go directly to the person(s) involved.

Step 2: Administrative Resolution: The administrative resolution process consists of a meeting between the parties involved with the director in attendance. An attempt at administrative resolution is to be made prior to requesting a formal resolution. If issues involve the director, proceed to step 3.

Step 3. Formal Resolution: Formal resolution consists of the submission of a problem-solving report to the Voyageurs Problem Solving Committee. The Problem Solving Committee is a standing committee consisting of 3 current board members, and is selected annually at the May board meeting. Members of this committee will receive mediation training and will offer unbiased consideration on the issues brought before them. A problem-solving report may be obtained from the board chairperson and submitted within 10 working days of the administrative resolution meeting. The Problem Solving Committee will then take one of the following actions within 5 working days of receiving the report.

A. Determine that the issue calls for a change in board policy or procedures or that current policy have not been adequately followed. The committee will recommend a plan of correction action to the board or director.

B. Conclude that the issue is personal opinion by an individual or small group of individuals and that changing policy or taking action based upon this opinion would not be in the best interest of the school community.

C. Seek further mediation on the issue

To initiate a problem solving procedure, you must complete the Problem-Solving Report located in the office.

## Disciplinary Guidelines

Although Voyageurs Expeditionary High School supports the theory of corrective discipline, school leaders retain discretion to take disciplinary action appropriate to the particular circumstances. Violations of rules or policies may result in disciplinary measures that may, depending on the circumstances and at the discretion of VEHS school leaders, include any of the following: verbal or written warnings, suspension, or immediate discharge. These disciplinary measures do not constitute an exclusive list of possible actions and may be taken in any order. They are intended as a guide to the staff member, and are not intended to create a contract or modify the employment-at-will relationship.

Engaging in any of the following examples of unacceptable conduct may result in the disciplinary actions listed above. These examples are not all inclusive.

- Dishonesty in any form or degree.
- Theft or unauthorized removal or use of any property belonging to Voyageurs Expeditionary High School, its' students or other staff members; unauthorized access to restricted areas, property or records.
- Damage or destruction of school property, or the property of students or staff members, due to intentional recklessness, carelessness or negligence.
- Falsification or alteration of records or reports, including, but not exclusively, timekeeping, employment, personnel, student records.
- Inability or unwillingness to perform assigned work in a manner consistent with school standards of quality or quantity of work; insubordination or failure/refusal to perform work as directed; other neglect of duty.
- Negligence in observing safety regulations or violation of safety rules.
- Excessive or fraudulent absence or tardiness; absence without leave.
- Inability or unwillingness to work in harmony with others; discourtesy to the school's customers or other persons doing business with the school.
- Fighting, or using profane, obscene, threatening or abusive language/behavior on school premises or while on school business.
- Possession or use of unauthorized dangerous weapons, including firearms on school property.
- Falsely stating or making claims of injury.
- Violation of the drug-free, smoke-free, alcohol-free policy.
- Sexual or other harassment.

## Confidentiality

Staff members are in daily contact with and have access to confidential information concerning Voyageurs Expeditionary High School and its students not generally known by non-school personnel. Confidential information can be developed by a staff member or obtained by a staff member as a result of the employee's relationship with the school. Confidential information must never be released, removed from school premises, copied or in any other way used by staff members for any purpose outside the scope of their school employment or revealed to non-school persons without the express written consent of the Director.

### Termination of Employment

If an at-will staff member wishes to resign from his or her employment with the school, the staff member is expected to give at least two weeks' written notice to the Director. This will enable Voyageurs Expeditionary High School to find a suitable replacement. Conversely, school officials will give employees at least two weeks' written notice before termination. Contracted staff members will be expected to fulfill the terms of their contracts. All terminating staff members will be asked to complete an exit interview, and all school property must be returned at the time of the exit interview.

### Policy Changes

It is inevitable that new policies will need to be written from time to time and old policies will need to be revised. We reserve the right to make any changes at any time with or without advance notice. Situations not covered in this handbook will be considered on an individual basis by the School Board.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF RECEIPT OF STAFF HANDBOOK**

I have received a copy of the Voyageurs Expeditionary High School Staff Handbook and understand the information contained in it. I further understand that the guidelines and benefits described may be changed/revised at the sole discretion of the School Board.

I agree in accepting employment with Voyageurs Expeditionary High School to abide by its guidelines, standards and procedures. I understand that failure to do so could result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.

I know that nothing in this handbook is to be construed as a contract and that all written and oral communications provided to me are intended for informational purposes only.

Staff Member Name (print) \_\_\_\_\_

Staff Member Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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Voyageurs Expeditionary High School is committed to providing a work environment free of harassment. Sexual harassment as well as harassment based on race, religion, national origin, age or other protected group status is against the law. Any staff member found to have acted in violation of this guideline will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

I will treat all persons I interact with while working for Voyageurs Expeditionary High School with dignity and respect, and in accordance with the Non-Harassment and Equal Employment Opportunity guidelines, and state and federal laws prohibiting harassment.

Staff Member Signature \_\_\_\_\_



# **Staff Handbook**

**2009-10**