

## Everything You Always Wanted to Know....

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SVGS will be a very different experience than your high school. You probably have many questions about what life at SVGS is like. Here are some answers to questions asked most frequently of staff and students.

### 1. Do I need a computer at home?

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Although most of our students have access to computers at home or at their parent(s)/guardian's place of work, it is not necessary to have a computer at home. However, having a computer at home is recommended if you can afford to have one! There is time built into the schedule for you to have access to computers at SVGS. In addition, the afternoon and evening hours will give you more time to work on the computers. Also, there are several laptops you may check out overnight or for the weekend from a staff member if you have a signed "permission to borrow" form on file with Ms. Conner. Students may access internet on their personal computer through our wireless network.

### 2. How much homework will I have?

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You will have a significant amount of homework! The best thing you can do is establish regular study hours and plan to spend **AT LEAST 30** minutes every night in reading, writing, problem-solving, drawing, rehearsing, etc. in **EACH** subject. This means you can expect to spend **AT LEAST 3 to 4 hours per week** outside of class working in each subject. (Compare this to college expectations of three hours outside of class for each hour in class! Our expectations are more than "usual" high school but still a little less than college expectations.)

You will be expected to complete assigned readings in preparation for class, complete long-term projects, produce art work, attend rehearsals, and do the "drill-and-practice" assignments. Most homework assignments are graded and failure to complete them on time will adversely affect your grades. However, even if a homework assignment will not be "graded", we expect you to complete it because the work will provide good practice and check your understanding of what is going on during the day.



SVGS assignments, projects, problems and take-home tests are long-term rather than overnight. This approach requires you to manage your time wisely and not try to do a two-week problem in two hours the night before it is due! This is VERY different from the normal high school approach, so be prepared!

### 3. What about working in groups?

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So much of what is done in research and business today is done in groups. It is critical for you to function well in this setting to succeed in life. You will be assigned to various research and project teams for each class throughout the year. Activities provide opportunities for each member of the team to be able to contribute to their successful conclusion. You and your team members will bear ultimate responsibility for the outcome of any project or activity. And be warned, your classmates will have high expectations of you!

### 4. What are the classes like?

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You will spend approximately 75% of your time in "traditional" classes. The rest will be devoted to group projects and activities. The time you do spend in class may not resemble your classes at your high school.

It is often difficult to tell if you are in math, physics or computer class. You will collect physics data in "math class", solve equations in "physics class", and use computers to do both.

Arts and Humanities classes require more group activities and performances than traditional high school arts and/or English classes. In addition, you will be attending some arts classes in local Theaters and /or studio spaces. The interdisciplinary nature of these classes, their locations, and your schedule may not resemble anything that you have experienced in the past. HOWEVER, no matter what the class looks like or where it is held, REMEMBER that you are in a GRADED class!

## 5. What do I do if I can't keep up?

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This will be very difficult for you to do because few of you have ever had to ask for help. But I implore you: Scream "help" to anyone who is within hearing. Well, not literally, but do ask your instructors, your classmates, or the Director for help. All of us want all of you to be successful and we will do everything possible to assist you. However, be prepared to work hard and long. (Too many people make the mistake of thinking that not having daily assignments means they do not have any work to do. You will almost always have work to do – it just may not be due the next day! Again, use your time wisely!)

Again, I beg of you, do not hesitate to ask for help. Do not feel embarrassed, think people will laugh at you, etc. It is much easier to help you catch up when the amount of material is small. Waiting until the day before the 6-weeks' test won't make us laugh at you but it is laughable and frequently impossible.

## 6. What if I don't do well on my first test/project in \_\_\_\_\_?

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You ARE smart and talented or you would not have been admitted. We just ask you to demonstrate your intelligence and talents in different ways! Remember: It's JUST a test. It's not "who you are," it does NOT mean you are not smart. It is NOT the end of anything! It's the BEGINNING of learning how to really study and prepare for advanced academic and artistic work. It is not unusual for SVGS students to not do as well as they are accustomed on the first test/project or two. We are here to HELP you learn how to do things better and smarter. This is something you must learn to be successful in college and employment. Ask for assistance immediately of your teachers and classmates and for support from your parents and friends. Repeat after me: I AM SMART AND TALENTED!!! I just need to learn how to do things differently.



## 7. Will I have time to talk informally with my teachers?

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Because several hours each week are devoted to group projects and there is a break built into each day, you will find some of your instructors are accessible during the morning. In addition, teachers arrive at 7:15 AM and are available until the start of homeroom. At least one teacher is also available during each "project time" block in the STEM program.



## 8. How do colleges find out about Governor's School courses?

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The credits you receive for SVGS courses are included on your official transcript from your high school. How they are listed varies from school to school. A description of the courses and program is attached to your transcript so college admissions officers who are unfamiliar with SVGS will know how much you have accomplished during your tenure here. In addition, those of you taking classes for JMU or BRCC credit will need to order a transcript from the college(s). Use the CEEB code for your high school, which is the custodian of your official school records.

Also, every senior receives a copy of short course descriptions that help explain to colleges the scope of work you accomplished while at SVGS. Counselors get a copy which they include in your college application packets.

### 9. [Will I be able to do things that really interest me?](#)

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The subjects taught here should interest you somewhat or you wouldn't be here, right? Assuming you mean really specific topics, the answer is yes. At any time you may propose experiments, projects or investigations that appeal to you and earn credit for carefully following through on your proposal. STEM students will conduct a semester-long research investigation during their first year, so you should choose this topic wisely. Arts students will be building their portfolios (which should greatly interest you), and Theater students will be enhancing their audition and/or portfolio skills. If none of these things interest you, perhaps you should question why you are here!

### 10. [Will I have opportunities for leadership at SVGS?](#)

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Students are encouraged to be involved in the outreach program, orientation teaching assistantships, and other activities that provide outlets for leadership and service. Senior projects are designed to provide a mentored experience in which students learn how to organize and motivate themselves and others in pursuit of service to some group. Get involved and let your leadership grow!!!

### 11. [Bottom-line, what is really different about SVGS?](#)

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Despite the admonishments in this manual, there are very few rules and guidelines here. That means you are responsible for the quality and quantity of your work, how much you learn and in how much detail, and the consequences of what you do or do not accomplish. We focus on problem solving which includes creativity and analytical thinking skills. Your teachers will act more like facilitators or coaches, meaning you can expect to hear answers to your questions such as, "I don't know" or "Let's find out". Do not expect us to regularly give you "the answer" to your question. It is crucial that you learn how to think things through and locate resources for yourself. In addition, students tell us that they really love being in a community of "learners" – other students who enjoy discovery of knowledge and creation of their response to that knowledge. They readily admit that they work hard in these pursuits, but almost all also manage to have FUN!

## Picky Details You Need to Know and Do to Survive....

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### Attendance

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#### How do I pre-arrange an absence?

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For your high school's events and activities (including sports and academic classes!), it is YOUR responsibility to let several people know when you will be gone at LEAST three days prior to your absence: Ms. Conner or Ms. Whitesell AND ALL of your teachers. If you do not do this, your absence will be counted as unexcused and you may not be entitled to make up missed work.

#### What do I do if I am unavoidably absent (for illness, death in the family, other emergency)?

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Your parent should call SVGS on the morning of your absence explaining the reason. This enables Ms. Conner to notify your high school of the reason for your absence and may avoid phone calls from your high school. By law, schools MUST speak with a parent or legal guardian if we do not know the reason for your absence.

#### What must I do after returning to school?

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We must have written confirmation of your absence – either before the fact for a pre-arranged absence, or upon your return to school. You have two days in which to do this. Failure to bring us a written note stating the reason for your absence means the absence is unexcused.

#### What do I do if I am late arriving at SVGS?

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You MUST check in FIRST with Ms. Conner. Then go on to your class. Teachers will not admit you to class if you have not checked in at the office and obtained a pass from Ms. Conner. You should bring a note explaining WHY you are late. This enables us to excuse you for the tardiness if you have a legitimate reason. (Ms. Whitesell decides what is reasonable. "Being tired" because you stayed up late for a rock concert is NOT an excuse.) Ms. Conner will NOT track you down and once homeroom has started your teachers will NOT add you to their roll.

#### What must I do if I need to leave early?

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You must bring a note stating the reason you need to leave early. In the event of an emergency, Ms. Conner will attempt to contact your parents to get verbal permission for you to leave. Otherwise, you are stuck at SVGS!

"Early" means any time prior to YOUR school's dismissal time.

*ALL NOTES MUST CONTAIN THE REASON(S) FOR THE ATTENDANCE VARIANCE.*

#### If I am helping with an outreach activity, do I need to contact my school?

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Ms. Conner will notify your school via the attendance sheet faxed each morning to the high school's attendance secretary. However, you should notify each of your teachers to make sure that you won't be missing a test or other critical class activity.

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## Homeroom policies

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### What is this “minute of silence?”

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The “minute of silence” was instituted by the General Assembly in 2002. You are required to be seated and engaged in a silent, respectful activity for the full minute at the beginning of homeroom each day. If you enter the school after the “minute of silence” has begun, you stop in your tracks until it is over, then proceed to Ms. Conner’s office to check in because YOU ARE LATE!!

### What about the Pledge of Allegiance?

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The General Assembly enacted legislation in 2002 that requires the Pledge of Allegiance to be offered in every school. You are not required to recite the pledge, but you must remain quiet and respectful while students who choose to recite the pledge do so.

### What else may I do during homeroom?

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Our homeroom is basically only as long as the above activities require it to be – two minutes. Classes begin IMMEDIATELY following the Pledge. If your first period is independent work time, you will move quietly out of the homeroom to your favorite place to study.

## Computer Uses

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### What may I do on SVGS computers and peripherals?

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You may engage in any activity that supports requirements for your classes at either SVGS or your high school. For example, you may write English or History papers (and print them) and conduct Internet research relevant to your classes. However, if students need our computers for SVGS work, that takes priority and you will be asked to relinquish your computer. Additionally, if your grades in SVGS classes are not up to par, your computer use may be monitored to help you make the best use of your time.

### What must I NOT do on SVGS computers and peripherals?

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You may NOT engage in any activity which does not directly support, or is not directly relevant, to your academic classes.

You may NOT download music.

You may NOT download graphics unless relevant to your classes, and then you must observe applicable copyright and intellectual property laws.

You may NOT download games.

*You may NOT play ANY games on SVGS computers.*

You may NOT do “instant messaging” or use other communications tools except for that provided by SVGS. You may NOT access web mail (AOL, Hotmail, etc). You have been provided with an SVGS e-mail account. There is no reason to access another while at SVGS.

You may NOT access any “blog” sites unless directed to do so by an SVGS teacher for classroom purposes.

You may NOT alter any of our machines in any way. That includes software downloads and hardware.

You may NOT lock your computer or leave it unattended for longer than a quick trip to the snack machine or restroom. If someone decides to play a nasty joke using your logon ID while you are absent from the computer, YOU are the responsible party.

You may NOT make personal color prints unless you PAY for them. It is 50 cents per page.

### [What will happen if I choose to violate the SVGS computer policy?](#)

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At the least, you will lose your computer privileges for up to two weeks the very FIRST time you violate the rules. This will make it very difficult for your teachers and for you. Depending upon the magnitude of your transgression, you may be suspended, serve detention, be expelled, and be subject to legal action. Subsequent offenses could see permanent revocation of SVGS privileges, suspension, expulsion, and legal action. This is serious stuff!

### [Journals](#)

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#### [What is a SVGS journal?](#)

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All new students will write a weekly journal. The journal is your place to let us know how things are going, how you feel, sound off, let off steam, etc. The teacher to whom you write the journal will reply, answer your questions, offer encouragement, offer advice on issues related to SVGS. You must remain polite and respectful in your journals. They are school documents composed on school property. Nothing unsuitable for public school students is to be discussed or included. Your journal is not a private correspondence. Your teacher will pass on to the Director anything of a serious nature. The journal counts for a small percent of your grade in either Research and Engineering or Humanities class.

### [Academics](#)

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#### [What do I do about making up work for excused absences?](#)

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When you prearrange an absence, the teacher can require you to complete work **BEFORE** you leave. This is to be expected for tests and exams.

When you are absent because of illness or other unavoidable reason, you have three (3) days to make up all of the missed work that was assigned while you were absent UNLESS you have arranged with the teachers for extensions. Work that was assigned prior to your absence and due during your absence is due the day you return to school. If you are absent on a test day, you will usually be expected to take the day you return.

Note: The ONLY excused absences for exams are verifiable family emergencies (death or serious illness of an immediate family member) and an illness that requires a doctor's treatment.

### [What will happen if I cheat?](#)

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You will at a minimum receive a zero for the entire assignment. Depending upon the magnitude of your dishonesty, you might have to serve detention, be suspended, or be expelled and/or fail for the grading period. Any disciplinary action taken is reported to your high school.

### How am I graded?

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Every class will be somewhat different. However certain things are common: class participation, group work and presentations are components in all classes. Your teachers will hand out (or make available via the web) a syllabus for the year and grading guidelines each six weeks.

### Am I required to take exams?

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SVGS classes require a comprehensive exam or major activity. This includes AP and dual-enrollment classes. There are NO exam exemptions for good grades, good attendance or other reasons. This is part of the “college” experience you get at SVGS.

### What happens if I miss an exam?

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If you are absent for an exam, you get a zero. The only exceptions are serious illness (the kind that requires doctor’s visits and prescription drugs) and death in the family. Other than those two, it is at the discretion of the teachers whether to allow you to make up the exam. Family vacations, headaches, colds, dead batteries, or forgetfulness do NOT count as excused unless the teacher allows these reasons. Again, this is comparable to what you will face in college.

## Recommendations

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### What to do if you need a recommendation?

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Teachers request a minimum of two weeks' notice to prepare your recommendations for college, summer camp, jobs or other things. Please respect this advanced notice. And no, it is not OK to say, "Just change a few things in that old recommendation you wrote for Podunk U." Teachers put a lot of thought into EACH recommendation, tailoring each for the specifics of your situation. These letters are important and DESERVE our best efforts. We can't give them our best if you don't give us the time.

## Driving and Parking

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### Where may I park?

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You have access to all MARKED spaces in the west parking lot EXCEPT for spaces along the sidewalk and the area near the fire hydrant. You MUST NOT park on the grass, in the fire lane, on the pavement in UNMARKED areas (near the entrances, near the dumpster, near the storage buildings, etc.).

If the west lot is full, your ONLY alternative is the east parking lot (*Egypt as the students say*).

You must NOT park in the ACSB lot across the road, in front of VCTC (reserved for staff and visitors), or in the area between VCTC and ETP (reserved for staff, visitors and buses).

### A word about your driving habits...

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Leave home early. Allow plenty of time. Don't speed. Don't pass stopped school buses. Don't cut off other drivers trying to enter a turn lane at the last minute. Don't push the red light. State police patrol Route 250 regularly and WWRC police patrol the road to the school. They are MERCILESS. Also, going slowly will give you a chance to avoid the deer and geese that like to wander without warning into the road. Be extra careful and cautious in the parking lot, and when entering or leaving it. In and near the parking area is where most accidents happen!!!

## Checking out laptops and calculators

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### How do I do this?

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First, you MUST have a "permission to borrow" form on file. Without this, you may not borrow expensive equipment.

Second, notify Ms. Whitesell of your need to borrow equipment.

## The Office

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### How do I avoid annoying Ms. Conner?

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Students do NOT use the copy machine. Only staff may use it. You may ask (politely and patiently) a staff member to make copies for you at twenty-five (25) cents each.



Students do NOT help themselves to supplies. Stay OUT of the workroom. Bring your own pencils, pens, paper and index cards. DO NOT ask her for these items. She loves to say yes and then you will have gotten her in trouble ☹️

Do NOT help yourself to candy money because you lost 50 cents in the drink machine. If you lose money, put a note on the machine WITH YOUR FULL NAME. The nice people who fill the machines will leave money for you with Ms. Conner.

Do NOT ask for change for a \$20 bill. We do NOT keep change. If you want a drink, bring quarters or dollar bills.

Do NOT make a lot of noise. This will annoy not only Ms. Conner but teachers and the Director. When you are enjoying your project time, do so QUIETLY. The school is very open and noise carries very easily. Remember elementary school and "6 inch voices?" That's what you MUST use when in the lounge or work areas.

Offer to help her with routine tasks if you see her desk stacked high. Alphabetizing forms, putting together packets, stuffing envelopes, etc., can all be done while you enjoy your break with friends.

Volunteer for outreach. It is an awesome experience for you and the younger students we teach.