

AGENCY OF EDUCATION

Barre, Vermont

TEAM: School Finance

ITEM: Will the State Board of Education grant renewal of general independent school approval, to serve students in ages 5-15 in grades K-8, to Kurn Hattin Homes, Westminister, VT?

SECRETARY'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

That the State Board of Education grants renewal of general independent school approval, to serve students ages 5-15 in grades K-8, to Kurn Hattin Homes, Westminister, VT. This approval is for five years, through June 30, 2022.

Approval is subject to the condition that the school immediately report to the Agency of Education whenever changes occur in enrollment, programs, policies, facilities, financial capacity, staffing or administration, during the approval period.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY: 16 V.S.A. § 166 (b)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

1. The New England Kurn Hattin Homes (NEKHH) educational philosophy is to transform the lives of children and their families forever. Since 1894, its purpose has been to provide and maintain a year-round home for children whose real home is in temporary need. It provides a nurturing environment where boys and girls aged 5-15 in grades K-8 prepare to rejoin their families and to develop into healthy, independent adults. The students come from throughout the Northeast. NEKHH is also licensed by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) as a Residential Treatment Center to serve up to 102 children, ages 5-15.
2. The State Board of Education last granted independent school approval to New England Kurn Hattin Homes on May 15, 2012 for five years through June 30, 2017.
3. Kurn Hattin was visited on behalf of the Secretary of Education by Brian Morgan on May 25, 2017.
4. The school occupies 280 idyllic acres on a hillside overlooking the Connecticut River and the New Hampshire Hills. It is named after Kurn Hattin in the Holy Land from where Christ is said to have delivered the Beatitudes. An expansive, two-story building, the Mayo Center, dominates the campus, and is the *de facto* school building. The first floor consists of four

spacious and well-equipped classrooms, a science laboratory, and a music room with ten practice rooms, a library, computer lab, two workrooms, a large cafeteria, and an auditorium. The public is often welcomed into the auditorium for concerts, and the Bellows Falls Rotary Club holds its monthly meetings in a room adjacent to the cafeteria. The cafeteria prepares its own food and provides a number of meals-on-wheels to local community members. The second floor has four classrooms, three as self-contained rooms for grades 2-4 and the fourth for K-1. The spacious art room is also on this floor. In addition to the Mayo Center, the campus includes an administration building, a gymnasium, and an outdoor swimming pool, a riding ring for the equestrian program, a greenhouse and gardens, a modest farm, and numerous hiking trails. The schools' reservoir is up the hill behind the Mayo Center. There are ten cottages, five for girls on the other side of Kurn Hattin Road in "Girls Town", and the five boys' cottages are on the other side of campus next to the gymnasium. There are a few apartments for faculty and staff. Each cottage contains two staff apartments. The facility meets all state and federal health and safety regulations and is handicapped accessible. A copy of the School Certificate of Occupancy (CO) issued by the Division of Fire Safety is on file at the Agency.

5. The minimum course of study, as prescribed in 16 V.S.A. § 906, is provided and adapted to the age and abilities of the students. Kurn Hattin utilizes an integrated academic program based on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The classes are ungraded and students are grouped according to ability levels, allowing students to work on the appropriate skills in each subject area. The small, skills-based groupings with available individual support help students engage with the curriculum. In addition to the school-based educational model and interventions, NEKHH students benefit from the consistency of the residential boarding school model. Each residential cottage has a consistent staff of house parents with established routines and structures surrounding the completion of, and engagement with independent work and reading time. Students are also able to experience rich extracurricular activities that integrate with the school program including a working farm, horse therapy program, sports programming, and creative arts. Every student is also assigned an individual counselor who provides guidance and as-needed therapeutic support. The integration of this service is a crucial piece of the NEKHH model in working with at-risk K-8 children. In addition, there are outside services supporting the educational objectives that include speech and language instruction, a consulting psychiatrist, a consulting physician, and numerous volunteers who assist in the library, reading program, mentor program, music department, and ski program. At the time of the visit, 98 students were enrolled: 88 residential and 10 day students. The population is largest in grades 6-8.
6. The school has the resources including financial capacity and qualified staff to meet its objectives. Current professional staff number 28 and the list includes nine teachers, four counselors, a music director, health services director, athletic director, financial manager, an accountant, computer resource manager, food services manager, director of admissions and outreach, staff nurse, music assistant, human resources director, horse program instructor, principal, and executive director.

A review of the financial statements, auditor's report from a NH public accountant firm, submitted with the application for reapproval indicates that the school is financially sound, although fundraising will continue to be extremely important.

7. The health, safety, attendance, and assessment records are in good order. Fire drills and evacuation drills are conducted regularly in the school and the residences.
8. The school maintains an operating schedule that includes a total number of instructional hours each year that is not less than that required of a public school serving the same grades.
9. The school has a policy on the prevention and reporting of harassment, hazing, and bullying that is as stringent as the Agency's model policy.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS: none

STAFF AVAILABLE:

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