

**State Board of Education
Independent School Approval Review Committee
Draft Meeting Minutes**

Meeting Place: Virtual Teams Meeting/Video/Teleconference

Call in #: 1-802-828-7667, Conference ID: 794 189 100#

1 National Life Drive

Montpelier, VT 05620-2501

Date: January 4, 2023

Present:

State Board of Education (SBE) Subcommittee Members: Tom Lovett, Jenna O'Farrell, Patrick Brown, and Lyle Jepson

Agency of Education (AOE): Patrick Halladay, Maureen Gaidys, Pat Pallas Gray, J. Deborah Ormsbee, Cassandra Ryan

Others: Josh Souliere, Meg Cottam, Madelief Becherer, Francis Moriarty, Lori Furrer, Mao Moriarty, Drew Gradinger, Kelley Bushey

Call to Order/Roll Call/Amendments to the Agenda

Tom Lovett called the meeting to order at 12:31 p.m. There were no amendments to the agenda.

Approve Minutes from December 19, 2022, Meeting

Tom Lovett made a motion to approve the minutes from the December 19, 2022 meeting. Jenna O'Farrell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Public to be Heard

Kelley Bushey from Connected Circles asked what had been discussed thus far. Tom reviewed the non-profit to profit status change discussion relating to Connected Circles, which will merely be annotated in the report.

Approval Backlog

There will be up to six/seven schools ready for the next meeting. Other reports (5) are in process. There are seven scheduled visits in January and two in February. They may be ready by April. Patrick Halladay outlined that some schools have not yet signed the addendum and he believes that they may be ready for February. Connected Circles update: One agency department has yet to provide input, but all reviews should be complete soon. A change in the business model will need to be updated. The Expeditionary School at Black River has not yet reached out to request a second application for approval.

Independent School Approvals

Orchard Valley Waldorf School, East Montpelier, VT.

The Secretary of Education is recommending renewal for five years of the Orchard Valley Waldorf School serving K-8 students.

Agency staff discussed that there were no concerns of note regarding the visit. It is a very active school, has a large campus with an abundance of outdoor educational spaces, and has a great deal of parent involvement. Record keeping is impeccable.

Madelief Becherer discussed the school board composition, which includes two parents. Parents are not involved in salary negotiations. There are 15 faculty members, eight of which are full-time, serving approximately 60 students. Title Funds are used for professional development and supplemental support for students.

Their goal is to “grow back” the 7th and 8th grade. They are looking to hire or incorporate a middle school staff member that would be available specifically to serve 6th-8th.

There is currently a very stable and committed faculty. Ms. Becherer discussed faculty recruitment and retention.

Motion Orchard Valley Waldorf School

A motion was made by Lyle Jepson and seconded by Patrick Brown to recommend to the full State Board of Education that the Orchard Valley Waldorf School renewal be approved for a period of five years. The motion passed unanimously.

Hiland Hall School, Bennington, VT

The Secretary recommends a renewal for five years of the Hiland Hall School. It is a K-8th grade school. Agency staff reported that there is very active parental engagement. There are a wide variety of academic offerings in the school. Student art is celebrated. Students are grouped by age and ability. There appears to be advanced levels of mathematics and literacy.

Meg Cottam indicated that there are 39 students currently being served. There are two full-time and two part-time teachers, in addition to parent volunteers.

Motion Hiland Hall School

A motion was made by Tom Lovett and seconded by Patrick Brown to recommend to the full State Board of Education that the Hiland Hall School renewal of general education for ages 5-13 be approved for a period of five years through 2027. The motion passed unanimously.

Mt. Mansfield Academy, Stowe, VT

Staff pointed out that they cannot make a recommendation for approval. There are no concerns except that Rule series 2200 requires that there be Department for Children and Families (DCF) or New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) accreditation. The school has been proactive in applying for NEASC accreditation. Lori Furrer from Mt. Mansfield Academy indicated that the final visit will be the first week of May.

Staff pointed out that they have been serving students for 30 years. Recently they have developed and implanted Advanced Placement (AP) programs. They have constructed a new academic building. When speaking with students, Agency staff were impressed with the supportive experience that students expressed they receive from the school. The students do academics and their sports programs, and they take care of themselves because of living away from home. The students are very mature.

Discussion including tabling the request until the NEASC report is complete and submitted. Until that time Mt. Mansfield Academy will continue to operate under its current status.

Patrick Brown encouraged Agency staff to incorporate a process for including student voice during visits.

Lori Furrer responded to questions indicating that there are 27 students in the full-year program and 35 in the winter term. The Board is made up of seven members. AP classes are taught locally and in collaboration with St. Johnsbury Academy. Service-Learning projects are varied throughout the year, incorporating the interests of the students. Positive impacts on the local community are important to the school.

Students who have specific learning needs receive small group support. The student day is a long one, between schooling and activities. Students need to be flexible, and they need to be able to adapt. Teachers also work independently with students, as needed. There are three students who have specific plans. Contacts within the mental healthcare system are accessed as needed to provide student support. There is an athletic trainer on staff. They also use the Sports and Rehabilitation Clinic a mile away from the school. They started the NEASC process some time ago as a self-improvement plan. There is an on-site visit in February. The turnaround may not be a quick one.

DCF does not apply to this type of residential program. They only license residential treatment facilities to which they will access placements for their clients.

Motion Mt. Mansfield Academy

Tom Lovett made a motion to table the discussion, with the understanding that there have been Rule changes necessitating access to the NEASC process. The day and boarding programs would then be taken up at the same time. Approval stays in place until the discussion is brought back to the table. The committee will rely upon the school to alert the committee as to when they have received their NEASC report and letter. Lyle Jepson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Manchester Village School, Manchester Center, VT

The Secretary of Education is recommending that both a renewal of current general education and special education, with the additional designation of special education for multiple disabilities.

Agency staff pointed out that it is a special education school serving grades 1-12. The facility is bright and welcoming. There is individual instruction. There are abundant green spaces outside and small class sizes. Three licensed special educators serve the students, with a total staff of seven. The school has been operated very successfully for many years. There are a variety of extracurricular activities that help support core instruction. Student enrollment is 20 with a maximum of 25, limited by philosophy and facility.

They are an S-Corp for-profit organization. The process they followed when developing the school was a result of students who needed a different experience to be successful. They started with four students and grew from there.

It was recommended by the Agency that the school clarify what services are included in the annual tuition and what services are additional.

The graduation rate is 1 or 2 students every year/every other year. Many transition back to their sending school for graduation. There is a gentle and deliberate transition. The goal is to be able to transition students back to their home school.

Motion Manchester Village School

A motion was made by Lyle Jepson and seconded by Patrick Brown to recommend to the full State Board of Education that the Manchester Village School receive both a renewal of current general education and special education, with the additional designation of special education for multiple disabilities. The motion passed unanimously.

Kindle Farm School, Newfane, VT

The Secretary of Education is recommending both a renewal of current general education and special education, with the additional designation of speech language impairment.

AOE staff indicated that Mr. Gradinger was a good partner in working through specific Rule changes and requirements. The team observed many students who were enjoying their educational experience. A group of students were working on the Game of Logging Certification, for which they test out in Levels 1 and 2. It was a great visit. There is campus in the downtown location, and another located two miles away.

There are 52 students. There is a 3:1 ration of students to staff. Ratios fluctuate depending upon student need. Mr. Gradinger discussed the history of Kindle Farm School. They are now a division of health Care & Rehabilitation Services of Vermont (HCRS). There are three clinicians with full support ancillary services. Tuition is 80% of income with approximately 20% coming from Medicaid.

Absenteeism was discussed. They had/have a strict procedure of team meetings and loss of credit. During COVID-19, the policy became more individualized. They communicate closely with districts and families.

Motion Kindle Farm School

A motion was made by Lyle Jepson and seconded by Patrick Brown to recommend to the full State Board of Education that the Kindle Farm School receive both a renewal of current general education and special education, with the additional designation of speech language impairment. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Gradinger commended AOE staff for their public service to the State of Vermont.

Committee Work Schedule

Mr. Lovett asked about the status of East Burke School, Bridge School, Mid Vermont Christian School, Champlain Valley Christian, Mill School, Lake Champlain Waldorf School, and United Christian.

Agency staff outlined what they were aware of regarding their understanding of the status of each. They also have a new application.

Kurn Hattin and Connected Circles are in process. The New England School for Girls general education visit has taken place. They are awaiting the special education report.

There could be as many as seven schools ready in February.

An automated flow chart is ready for launch and for use by Agency staff, which should support the process.

Agency staff has five confirmed visits in February, with one each in March and April. More will be added.

Mr. Lovett requested an updated tracker. Staff will continue to provide updates.

Public to be Heard

Kelley Bushey indicated that it was good to hear about the back log and how it is being handled. Connected Circles had their visit in late October, with an early November report delivery date by staff to the Agency. Connected Circles has not heard anything since. She indicated that the lapse in response time is urgent and is having a significant impact on students.

Adjourn

Patrick Brown moved to adjourn the meeting. Jenna O'Farrell seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 2:15 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Lyle Jepson

