

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#

Date: October 3, 2024

Present

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

Agency of Education (AOE): Suzanne Sprague, Pat Pallas Gray, Roseanne Neddo

Others: Beth Friedman AISNE, Edie Traina, Beth Hamilton, Sara Wilson Executive Director AISNE, Cameron Staples NEASC, George Edwards NEASC

Call to Order/Roll Call/Amendments to the Agenda

Tom Lovett called the meeting to order at 3:32pm. Lyle requested that two items be added to the agenda; an update on assurances from schools and an update on schools that will be ready to come before the committee for approval in the near future.

Approval of Draft Minutes from the September 6, 2023 Meeting

Tom made a motion to approve the minutes from September 6, 2023 meeting. Jenna seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Public to be Heard

There was no public to be heard.

Independent School Approvals

Tom explained the three types of Independent School Approvals and the rules that need to be followed by each.

1. Recognized Schools
2. Approved Schools but not receiving tuition

3. Approved Schools receiving public funding (includes serving students with special needs and service agreements with local education agency)

All approved schools need to sign an attestation in order to receive public payments, including areas of health, safety and non-discrimination.

AISNE - Association of Independent Schools in New England

They work with 270 schools, of which 21 are in the State of Vermont.

AISNE staff reviewed their DEI evidence-based review process. Nondiscrimination statements must be publicly published as required by law. Every five years they update and/or revise their standards bring an intentional focus to DEIB (adding belonging). As standards are reviewed every five years, any changes are communicated with member schools. Expert practitioners are drawn from membership schools. Communications are launched with webinars and personalized interaction with schools that are going through the self-study process.

They embed the standards within the curriculum standards, practices and operations (facilities). Every visit includes a practitioner in DEIB with the goal of supporting self-evaluation of DEIB practices. They look for evidence within the curriculum, stated practices and published policies.

Facilities are similar and include crisis management plans.

Part of the process is offering technical assistance. Schools that go through the process have regular monthly check-ins as a cohort. At times, extensions are requested or recommended as schools work through the process.

Schools must be in compliance with all standards, or they go into provisional status. Focused guidance and support is then provided.

Annual reports include enrollment, demographics, revenue and expenditures, size of school, major changes - such as administration change, grade level additions, deletions, campus size changes, compensation models. Schools are asked to reaffirm that they have maintained all requirements, providing annual audits and evidence of non-discrimination compliance.

The five-year visits include a reflection on the biannual report and updates on the action plan created at that time and at the prior ten-year visit. They must address any recommendations that were included in prior reports.

Motion to Approve: Tom made a motion that the committee propose to the full State Board of Education that the Association of Independent Schools in New England (AISNE) be approved as an Accreditor of Independent Schools in Vermont. Jenna seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Public to Be Heard

There was no public to be heard.

NEASC New England Association of Schools and Colleges

NEASC has been in existence since 1939 and currently works with 39 independent Schools. They serve schools throughout New England, nationally and in 92 countries. They work with over 1,600 schools combined. There is active Vermont representation within their organization.

DEIB is embedded in the standards. Schools are required to survey faculty, students, alumni and parents. Teams then meet in person with each group when they visit. They have a DEIB professional on each visiting team who provides input.

Schools are required to create goals, if any areas in any standard have received recommendations. A strategic plan is required, and it must reflect the recommendations. Technical assistance is provided. It is a “high touch” process.

There is a small school protocol to make the process more tailored to their needs. Meeting schools where they are is a priority. The same standards apply but tools and strategies are provided to small schools. There is a two-pronged small schools visit. They focus on operational vitality standards first and then, 6-months later, they focus on programmatic components, breaking up the work for faculty and staff.

Process was reviewed. Annual touch points include updated information on leadership, governance, finances, all funneled through a NEAC relationship manager who provides each school with regular communication and feedback. There may also be a substantive change report required. Staff visits are required at this juncture. Event based issues (floods, crisis) may require a site-based staff or focused visit, as well.

Motion to Approve: Tom made a motion that the committee propose to the full State Board of Education that the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) be approved as an Accreditor of Independent Schools in Vermont. Lyle seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Schools in the Approval Pipeline

Pat pointed out that a document is being prepared that will provide a picture of the entire list of schools, where they stand and how the AOE will move forward through the 2025 school year.

They have developed an application that is being vetted and will go out to all schools to determine where each school is in the process. It is intended to transition schools from the former regulations to the new regulations. They do not visit the NEASC approved schools.

Desk audits will be completed. Reports will then be vetted by Legal and the Secretary prior to distribution to the Committee. There are 13 school reports that will be ready as soon as possible

following a desk audit. An additional 13 schools will require visits with a special education liaison accompanying the team.

There is one school in the state that is accredited by NNEC. Pat will ask Legal to see if they intend to reach out to alert them to the changes. Tom will also reach out to invite their application, with hopes they would be on the November agenda for approval.

There is a list of schools that indicated assurance of their compliance with the required standards. Fifty-five schools are on the list. They have reached out to schools who do not want to receive funding. There are five schools in the state that do not wish to receive public funding. Checks and balances are in place.

Public to Be Heard

There was no public to be heard.

Adjourn

Tom moved to adjourn the meeting. Jenna seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 4:43p.m.

Minutes prepared by Lyle Jepson

