

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: November 19, 2024

Present

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

Agency of Education (AOE): Maureen Gaidys, Suzanne Sprague, Jaime Kraybill

Others: Ken Fredette, Liz Oberreiter, Clayton Petry, Jamie Kraybill, Lileth Coke (AAA), Mark Bugbee (AAA), Alison Novak, Lori Dolezal

Call to Order/Roll Call/Amendments to the Agenda

Tom Lovett called the meeting to order at 3:01pm. There were no amendments to the agenda.

Approval of Minutes from the November 6, 2024, Meeting

Tom Lovett made a motion to approve the minutes from the November 6, 2024, meeting with one amendment changing the verb "claims" in the Public to be Heard section to "stated". Lyle Jepson seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Public to be Heard

Mr. Fredette expressed [concerns](#) over accrediting agencies that discriminate or fail to show their "books".

Overview

Mr. Lovett outlined that the role of the Committee in this instance is to recommend approval or non-approval of accrediting agencies to the full State Board of Education. Approved accrediting agencies become a third-party that provide a school visitation report to the AOE for consideration, eliminating the need for the AOE to do so. Review for rigorous standards, clear

processes, a school visit, and cooperation/collaboration with the AOE are required. This is only part of the school approval process. Each school is further required, and is responsible for, providing evidence of compliance with Vermont Standards and each is required to complete an application to the AOE. The AOE then presents a recommendation to the State Board of Education for determination of approval or non-approval. In addition, specific rules must be followed for an independent school to receive public education funding.

In the past, 11 accrediting agencies were approved to serve the review and visitation process. They were grandfathered until December 1st, 2025, at which time five came forward requesting continued approval. Three of the five schools have previously worked in Vermont with Vermont independent schools. Two were well known to the Committee. The others are less well known, which requires more time on the part of the Committee to review requests.

The committee requires that all demonstrate rigorous standards, comprehensive visitation procedures, that each are knowledgeable of the requirements set forth by the State, and that each has clear processes for establishing that schools meet Vermont standards.

Review of Applications for Approval as an Accreditor of Independent Schools of Vermont

Adventist Accreditation Association - Lileth Coke and Mark Bugbee attended on behalf of the Adventist Accreditation Association (AAA)

Lileth Coke presented a power point outlining their organization's mission, standards and process. The overview included information on organizational demographics, mission of Adventist Education, teacher preparation, the renaming of the Association in 1997, the breadth of their accreditation services, the nine standards they follow, a six-year cycle of continuous improvement process, and the organization's understanding of Vermont State Laws including a Rule 2200.

Regarding Rule 2200, Ms. Coke explained that AAA alignment provides private schools with educational standards, expectations regarding diversity and additional special education provisions, if applicable. Indicators are used to ensure compliance within the nine standards. Ms. Coke further indicated that Section 2227 standards are followed.

Subjects taught in both elementary and secondary education were highlighted. Student, parent, teacher surveys are used to gather feedback.

Ms. Coke reiterated that, if approved as an accrediting agency, AAA can and will move to a five-year cycle, aligning with Vermont requirements.

Requirements of Title IX was reviewed by Ms. O'Farrell. Ms. O'Farrell noted that not all protected classes are listed in the AAA application that schools working with AAA are asked to fill out. The application does not address all of the protected classes as required by Vermont.

Ms. Coke responded that AAA caters to the “whole individual” and “embraces everyone”. It is part of their philosophy to accept everyone. When asked about sexual identity, marital status and other protected classes, Ms. Coke responded that they accept everyone. Ms. O’Farrell indicated that it was not in writing that she could find. Ms. Coke indicated that there are other resources that she can forward to the Committee.

AAA accredits residential programs, but none are yet being considered in Vermont. There are separate standards that need to be complied with. Ms. Coke will send documentation relating to this topic.

Mr. Jepson indicated that it is important for the Committee to see in their documentation the terminology used that protects classes of individuals as found in Vermont’s requirements. Ms. Coke believes that their standards are similar to Vermont’s requirements.

Training of the visiting team members was reviewed and concluded the discussion.

Western Association of Schools and Colleges – Liz Oberreiter attended on behalf of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)

Ms. Oberreiter discussed her background, including 38 years in education at all levels of education; as a teacher, administrator, and consultant supporting schools with improvement.

Ms. Oberreiter discussed alignment with Vermont’s requirements as found in Rule 2200. Visiting committees will review Vermont’s school-based criteria, which emphasize inclusivity. The focus on high quality across diverse educational settings. Diversity, equity, and student wellbeing are each emphasized by integrating Vermont’s values and vision for culturally responsive education. They look for diversity in the faculty, as well. Including staff training in the area of DEI.

Ms. Oberreiter indicated that they will modify their cycle to a five-year cycle. Prior to the meeting Ms. Oberreiter had shared WASC DEI, mission statement and other documents, which highlight her confidence that WASC understands the requirements set forth by Vermont. She pointed out that WASC has experience with aligning their standards with those of individual states.

Ms. O’Farrell pointed out that their non-discrimination statement aligns with the Vermont requirements.

Mr. Lovett asked if there is a rating system for the action plans. She indicated that they do not prescribe what a school needs to do. They provide recommendations in a non-prescriptive manner, while aligning with the standards. The action plan outlines what is best for the students. Areas found to need improvement require an update to WASC within six weeks following a recommendation. Probationary status can result for two-years if there are areas that need to be modified/corrected.

Because WASC does not have a school in Vermont, discussion centered on what the visiting team composition would be and from what organizations and/or schools visiting team members would be drawn. Ms. Oberreiter pointed out that they would work with other accrediting agencies to engage with professional visiting team members.

Executive Session

Tom Lovett moved that pursuant to 1 V.S.A. §313(a)(1) that the Board finds that premature general public knowledge of confidential attorney-client communications made for the purpose of providing professional legal services to the State Board of Education regarding application of the Board's Rule 2227 would clearly place the Board at a substantial disadvantage. Jenna O'Farrell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Tom Lovett further moved that the Board enter executive session to receive confidential attorney-client communications made for the purpose of providing professional legal services to the Board regarding application of the Board's Rule 2227 pursuant to 1 V.S.A. §313(a)(1)(F). The motion was seconded by Jenna O'Farrell and passed unanimously.

The committee entered executive session at 4:00 pm.

The committee exited executive session at 4:58pm.

Motion:

Having received additional information provided by Adventist Accreditation Association, Tom Lovett made a motion that finds Adventist Accreditation Association in compliance with Rule 2227 and that the Committee recommends approval of Adventist Accreditation Association as an accrediting agency in the State of Vermont. The motion was seconded by Lyle Jepson and passed unanimously.

Having received additional information provided by Western Association of Schools and Colleges, Tom Lovett made a motion that finds Western Association of Schools and Colleges in compliance with Rule 2227 and that the Committee recommends approval of Western Association of Schools and Colleges as an accrediting agency in the State of Vermont. The motion was seconded by Jenna O'Farrell and passed unanimously.

Tom noted that all agencies will be on the agenda for tomorrow's (11/20/24) State Board Meeting, with recommendations for the number of years each agency will be approved.

Public to Be Heard

Mr. Fredette thanked the Committee for its thoughtfulness and transparency in the process.

Adjourn

Jenna O'Farrell moved to adjourn the meeting. Tom Lovett seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 5:05p.m.

Minutes prepared by Lyle Jepson

