

Site Review

Renewal- Mt. Mansfield Academy

Independent School Review Report General Education

Site Review Conducted - September 22, 2022

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Site Review Scope of Work and Purpose

Mt. Mansfield Academy is a general education alpine ski racing school, in Stowe Vermont, approved to enroll students in grade six through twelve. The school offers two boarding and day educational models: a school program that follows a traditional school calendar for grades seven through twelve and a five-month winter term ski academy program for grades six through twelve. Within the winter term program, families have two options: session one begins in November and session two begins in January.

This report will also address the educational compliance of both programs as well as provide information confirming the candidacy of Mt. Mansfield Academy with New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC).

General Education

State Board of Education Rule 2225.2, 2225.5

Members of the agency's Independent School team met with Mt. Mansfield Academy's staff and students on September 22, 2022. Interviews were conducted at the school's campus, accessible via Route 108 in Stowe, Vermont. Staff interviews were conducted with the head of school, core instructors and students in grades nine through twelve.

School Philosophy

Mt. Mansfield Academy's renewal application states that:

"The philosophy of the Mt Mansfield Ski Club & Academy is to provide an alternative and unique educational experience for students involved in competitive winter sports at the elite level. MMSCA has operated as a five-month winter term program for the past 27 years and [was approved to add] a full-time option in Fall of 2020. We continue to offer both and are committed to offering a quality academic experience for elite level athletes."

Program Objectives

Mt. Mansfield Academy provides a rigorous academic curriculum, with highly qualified staff that supports both the winter term and school year students. In addition to usual curriculum requirements for students in grades six through twelve, Mt. Mansfield has worked diligently, since 2019, to develop and implement Advanced Placement courses as well as an Advanced Placement Seminar.

Mt. Mansfield Academy provides a curriculum, for the school year program, is aligned with the Common Core State Standards and Next Generation Science Standards. Winter term student academics, provided by the home schools, is well supported by Mt. Mansfield Academy staff. All students enrolled in either winter term or the school year program "will take an active role in their academics within discussion groups, experiential activities, presentations, peer collaboration and problem solving. The school environment will instill a sense of curiosity, the ability to advocate for oneself and become independent learners."

School Enrollment

16 V.S.A. §166(b)(4), State Board of Education Rule 2225.3

Students enrolled in Mt. Mansfield Academy come from Canada and throughout the United States. Students are placed by parents whose child is interested in the rigorous ski academy training and alpine racing ski competition.

The regular term program follows a traditional school year, and the winter term program begins on either November 1st or January 1st. Most students who have enrolled in winter term programs attend through the end of March. However, some students may only be on campus for four weeks or during a winter break from their home schools, to receive intensive ski instruction. Winter term student enrollment is flexible and academic programming responsibilities are shared by a student's home school teachers and Mt. Mansfield Academy instructional staff. The agency's review team confirmed, during an interview with head of school, that there is an ever-increasing demand for enrollment in both the school year program and winter term programs.

The Independent School Team confirmed there are currently twenty-seven students enrolled in the school year program with an expected enrollment of thirty-five winter term students, beginning November 1, 2022, exceeding the school's expectations.

It is important to note that Mt. Mansfield Academy, in anticipation of academic programming, initiated an expansion of the school facilities in 2018. Mt. Mansfield Academy's expansion was completed in 2020 (see facilities section for additional information)

Governance

State Board of Education Rule 2225.4

Mt. Mansfield Academy's Governance Board engaged in strategic planning throughout 2019 – 2021 and have restructured its duties to ensure oversight of the newly approved school year program. The head of school reported to the agency that "in March of 2018 the two separate boards of the Mt Mansfield Ski Club and Mt. Mansfield Winter Academy discussed and voted to merge the two organizations who had been working collaboratively for 25 years..."

Presently there is one board of directors which include the Executive Director, the Head of School, the Athletic Director, and the Finance Director.

Minimum Course of Study & Required Assessments

16 V.S.A. §166(b), State Board of Education Rule 2225.5

Mt. Mansfield Academy's school year program offers a rigorous traditional curriculum for students in grades seven through twelve. Students attend small classes comprised of six to ten students. Course offerings include history, math, science and English Language Arts, health and wellness with a heavy social emotional learning component and Vermont History. However, students may also request specialized one-to-one elective courses in a high interest topic such as private language instruction in Mandarin.

Additionally, students may enroll in advanced placement classes in most core subjects and may attend the advanced placement seminar implemented at the beginning of this school year.

Course offerings include a comprehensive variety of electives such as fine arts and students are required to participate in one of several service-learning projects centered in Lamoille County.

Mt. Mansfield Academy's renewal application describes instructional objectives and methods as "Our approach will spiral off the present one-on-one setting to small group classrooms providing the attention and instruction that will encourage discussion, peer collaboration, hands on/student involvement work. A knowledge-based learning approach will be woven in where applicable particularly in Language Arts and History. Active classrooms and vibrant, innovative teaching will foster the development of students becoming independent learners."

Instructional staff utilize a variety of best practice instructional methods to ensure Mt. Mansfield Academy's curriculum meets the needs of all learners, by grade and ability level. Additionally, instruction is purposefully designed to "allow for collaboration among both students and staff, support for specific needs and enrichment whenever possible." Small class design enables teachers to facilitate differentiated instruction to support each student and to provide ample one-on-one instruction, when required or requested by a student.

Intensive school-wide effort is underway to improve and expand school year academic assessment methods. The head of school indicated that "initially we will be establishing and ... focusing on learning targets aligned with assessments for each course."

Winter term students arrive by November 1st or January 1st and academic programming for these students is the responsibility of the home school. Winter term students work with content area staff to receive instructional support and receive individualized attention to ensure completion of home school assignment expectations.

The Independent School team confirmed that Mt. Mansfield Academy meets all State Board Rules for Minimum Course of Study and have exceeded minimum, in some curricular areas, due to the addition of advanced placement course and seminars.

Professional Staff

State Board of Education Rule 2225.8

The Mt. Mansfield Academy staff are qualified to teach in their assigned areas of responsibility. Many teachers hold a current Vermont educator's license. Both the school year and winter term staff have college degrees, and in many cases, advanced degrees.

Mt. Mansfield Academy will be hiring to expand winter term teaching staff to accommodate increasing winter term enrollment numbers.

Teachers are encouraged to engage in regular content area and pedagogical professional development opportunities. Staff are also encouraged to focus on social emotional learning techniques to support delivery of curriculum.

In-service training at Mt. Mansfield Academy is scheduled regularly during August in-service and throughout the school year. Opportunities are "unique to the needs of the staff and occurs both as one group but also in "content" area groups." The two most important tools for Mt.

Mansfield Academy's teachers [are] creativity in the classroom and communication. Professional development includes topics such as differentiated instruction, community-based education for service-learning opportunities and student support services.

For incoming winter term staff, a professional development workshop is offered in late October with a focus on content area support in either a 1:1 setting or during facilitated small cohort groups.

Staffing Safeguards:

Interviews with Mt. Mansfield Academy's head of school and academic staff confirmed that all school year and winter term staff, coaches, volunteers, and winter athletic support staff have undergone fingerprinting and child/adult abuse registry background checks

Mandatory Reporting Procedures:

Mt. Mansfield Academy has published the school's mandatory reporting policy in all of its handbooks. Additionally, school year and winter term staff receive annual refresher training in August and October respectively.

Health & Safety

At the time of the site review the Independent School team confirmed with the head of school that all staff members are trained in CPR and First Aid and participate in annual refreshers. The head of school also confirmed that training certificates are included in staff professional folders.

The science lab is fitted with a hood to vent chemical fumes during chemistry classes. The school replaced the fire suppression blanket and updated eye washing station, as well. The head of school consults with the local fire department and the Stowe Police Department to practice monthly fire drills and other emergency service drills that may be required (lock down and active shooter drills).

Nursing Services, Medications, and Immunization Records:

Students have access to regular and emergency medical services.

Hazing, Harassment & Bullying Policies

The Independent School team confirmed Mt. Mansfield Academy's student, staff and school policies that discipline practices are an extension of the school's stated philosophy.

The review team confirmed that the school has adopted the Agency of Education's required policy on Hazing, Harassment and Bullying, and is published in staff, family, and student handbooks. Staff receive annual refreshers on these policies during either the annual August or October inservice staff meetings.

Facilities

State Board of Education Rule 2225.6

All three of Mt. Mansfield Academy's school buildings are in good repair, clean and well organized. Certificates of Occupancy have been submitted to the Agency of Education including a copy of the elevator inspection certificate.

Mt. Mansfield Academy's main building, new academic building and sports training facility are hard wired for both a fire alarm and sprinkler system. Fire extinguishers are placed throughout each building including prominent signage.

Financial Capacity:

As part of the renewal application process, Mt. Mansfield Academy's head of school submitted documents verifying the financial position of the Academy and a notarized letter from the Governing Board's treasurer. When Mt. Mansfield Winter Academy merged with the Mt. Mansfield Ski Club in May of 2018, it strengthened the financial outlook by combining two successful non-profits. All financial obligations are met and are balanced with viable and sustainable assets. Cash reserves are increased annually as a result of continued net profitability.

The Agency of Education's review team has verified that Mt. Mansfield Academy has met all financial requirements under State Board Rule 2226.9.

Initial Approval Recommendation:

In anticipation of approval of new State Board Rule Series 2200, Mt. Mansfield Academy engaged proactively in applying for NEASC accreditation to ensure it meets the safety and oversight requirements of the State Board of Education for residential/boarding schools in Vermont. The Independent School team verified that Mt. Mansfield Academy's head of school, executive director and Governance Board members are working with the New England Association of Schools and Colleges' (NEASC) accreditation representatives since 2019 and received candidacy status in 2021. The NEASC review and approval process is expected to be completed by July 1, 2023.

Mt. Mansfield Academy meets the criteria for renewal of approval except for Rule 2227, which applies to an independent school that operates a boarding program, enrolls students as boarding students, or operates a residential treatment program. As a school with a boarding program, Mt. Mansfield Academy is required to be accredited by a State Board recognized accreditor; or licensed as a residential childcare facility by the Department for Children and Families (DCF). Mt. Mansfield Academy has not received accreditation and is not licensed by DCF. Accordingly, the Agency of Education cannot recommend renewal of approval due to noncompliance with Rule 2227 at this time.