

Site Review

Renewal– Pacem School

Independent School Review Report General Education

Site Review Conducted - May 16, 2022

Submitted by Independent School Review Team:
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Site Review Scope of Work and Purpose

Pacem School submitted its renewal application in a timely manner meeting State Board of Education renewal requirements under 2227.

General Education

State Board of Education Rule 2226.2

Members of the agency's Independent School team met with Pacem School staff on May 12, 2022. Interviews were conducted at the school, which is located at 32 College Street, Suite 100 in Montpelier, VT. School staff present for interviews were the head of school and content area instructors.

School Philosophy

Pacem School is focused on providing a student centered progressive academic experience for students in grades six through twelve. Additionally, Pacem provides home school families with opportunities to enrich student learning and additional academic engagement opportunities not available to all families.

The school's education philosophy is posted on its website and in admissions materials.

"At Pacem School we work together to solve problems collaboratively and create a community that honors everyone; we seek peace within ourselves; and we wrestle with the hard questions about how people could live together more peacefully in the world."

Program Objectives

The school's specific academic objectives align with its mission and vision statements. Methods for delivery of academic learning and social development includes a specific set of values:

"Pacem School is an intellectually inspiring, joyful learning community we [also] offer coursework and extra-curricular support to homeschoolers age 10 - 18. Our students are curious and passionate. We give them time and freedom to pursue their interests while supporting them with an intellectually rich curriculum. Our exceptional faculty, all experts in their fields, inspire and guide our students every day. Pacem provides a community where each student is known and cherished. This setting allows our students to develop confidence, feel empowered, and to blossom."

School Enrollment

16 V.S.A. §166(b)(4), State Board of Education Rule 2226.3

Agency's Independent School team members confirmed that Pacem School's enrollment is currently 22 students. There are two pathways for enrollment at Pacem. The first option is for parents to enroll their students directly through the application process. The second option affords parents of home school students the ability to register their children for classes. Pacem's published admissions application includes a non-discriminatory statement, "Pacem School does

not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or national origin.” The school follows a traditional school year calendar and enrolled students are in attendance for a minimum of 175- 178 days.

Enrollment demand for the FY22 and FY23 school years was so high that the school instituted a firm application deadline of April 15th. In addition to the submission of an application, Pacem requires interested families to:

...“Schedule a student visit; please plan on visiting at least one class that you are interested in taking. Because of high demand, we are combining visits into a few designated days. If you are unable to visit during those days, we can schedule another time. If you are currently out of state, we can arrange to meet you over zoom. Please contact us to find out more!

- Review and sign the Mission and Community Guidelines Agreement (in the application form)
- Provide school records [and] end of the year assessments

Once the admissions decision is made, successful applicants will be sent a link to register online. A completed registration form and deposit are necessary to hold the student’s place in the school.”

Enrollment decisions are made collaboratively by committee that is comprised of the head of school and instructional staff members.

Governance

State Board of Education Rule 2226.4

Pacem School’s Governance Board is comprised of eight community members who serve a term of 3 years. Board member positions include a president, treasurer, secretary, director of education programing, two faculty representatives, home school parent representative and a student body representative. Board members range in professional expertise including finance and professional educators with many years of curriculum and assessment development experience.

Minimum Course of Study & Required Assessments

16 V.S.A. §166(b), State Board of Education Rule 2226.5

Pacem’s academic program is a blend of student-centered exploration coupled with instructional skill and content area learning provided by instructors who utilize several modalities of instruction to... “ ensure depth of understanding and mastery of concepts.”

Academic instruction is provided for ninety-five minutes, per content area class. Instructional opportunities include small peer groupings of 2 – 3 students, individualized one-to-one instruction or provided through whole class instruction on content area knowledge and for academic skill development. Pacem’s head of school stated during an interview that “class content is meant to be meaningful and connected—to the student’s interests, to other classes when possible, and to the real world beyond the classroom. While we want our students to be

informed and well-rounded, we focus on depth.” Content area instruction is rigorous, engaging and meets Minimum Course of Study requirements under State Board Rule, 2226.5

Classes are multi-graded and are structured appropriately to meet the learning needs of each student. Interviews with the head of school and content area instructors described classes as purposefully structured to align with the school’s stated philosophy and academic objectives. This is achieved by grouping students “loosely by age range. The middle school program serves students ages 10-14, roughly equivalent to grades 5-8. In general, [Pacem] offers two levels within this age span (10-12 and 12-14). The high school program serves students ages 14-18. First and second year high school students generally are 14-16 years old and 3rd and 4th year high school students generally are 16-18 years old, roughly corresponding to grades 9-10 and 11-12.” (Sources: Renewal Application, Pacem website <https://pacemschool.org/academics/academic-approach/>)

Professional Staff

State Board of Education Rule 2226.8.1

All Pacem School’s instructional staff are qualified to teach in their area of specialty. Many instructional staff members have master’s degrees. Classroom observations are conducted by the head of school as part of a collaborative process with instructors. Professional development is offered by the school and instructional staff members are encouraged to identify professional development opportunities that meet established teaching goals.

Teachers take an active role in developing the school’s curriculum . Curriculum development includes integration of outdoor exploration, community-based learning, and support for individualized student learning opportunities. Teachers collaborate regularly to ensure that student learning is consistent and developmentally appropriate including authentic assessment strategies to both meet State Board of Education requirements and align with the school’s academic and community objectives.

Staffing Safeguards & Mandatory Reporting

State Board of Education Rules 2227.12

The agency’s review team confirmed that all Pacem School staff have completed fingerprinting and child/adult abuse registry background checks. Verification forms for each staff member is included in their official file.

The head of School reviews the mandatory reporting policy annually during August in-service professional development and the policy complies with 16 V.S.A.§ 251-260.

Health and Safety, Nursing, and Immunization

State Board of Education Rules 2226.7

Pacem School has formal plans in place for fire drills, which are held monthly. The head of school, instructors and Board members are currently revising active shooter and shelter in place policies in response current events.

All staff receive training in First Aid and CPR. Medical equipment and first aid kits are easily accessed throughout the building.

Emergency exit posters and maps are prominently displayed in all classrooms, individualized learning spaces and hallways. Emergency instructions include easy to read and understand graphic instructions and a map to ensure students, staff and visitors can locate emergency egress locations.

Pacem School does not employ a school nurse and does not administer any student medications. However, Pacem School staff utilize local 911 services as needed to address student emergency medical needs.

Student health information is included in student files including parent/family medical emergency release forms and current student immunization records. All student files are locked in a secure cabinet in the head of school's office and included in secure digitized student filing system.

Hazing, Harassment & Bullying Policies

At the time of review, agency personnel confirmed that Pacem School has adopted the Agency of Education's policies and protocols for hazing, harassment, and bullying. The policy is included in staff and family handbooks. During August in-service professional development, staff review these policies.

Facilities

State Board of Education Rule 2226.6(3)

Pacem School is housed in one building on the campus of the Vermont College of Fine Arts in Montpelier. There are three main classroom spaces, two – three individual learning spaces designed to accommodate two – three students, and common spaces for faculty to meet with students individually. The head of school and support staff have offices, as well. Pacem school' facilities are ADA compliant. All classroom and office spaces are clean, well-organized, and welcoming.

Financial Capacity:

State Board of Education Rule 2226.9

Pacem School submitted a copy of its profit and loss statement, confirming the school has met rule 2226.11 requirements and has the financial capacity to carry out its educational purposes for the period of approval.

Initial Approval Recommendation:

The agency's Independent School team recommends renewal of Pacem School to the Secretary of Education for a period of five years. The school's academic program, facilities and financial standing all meet State Board of Education requirements to operate.