

AGENCY OF EDUCATION
Barre, Vermont

TEAM: School Finance

ITEM: Will the State Board of Education grant renewal of general independent school approval, to serve a maximum of 50 students in grades 7-12, to Mt. Mansfield Winter Academy, Stowe, VT?

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

That the State Board of Education grants renewal of general independent school approval, to serve a maximum of 50 students in grades 7-12, to Mt. Mansfield Winter Academy in Stowe, Vermont. This approval is for five years, through June 30, 2021.

Approval is subject to the condition that the school immediately report to the Agency of Education whenever changes occur in enrollment, programs, policies, facilities, financial capacity, staffing or administration, during the approval period.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY: Title 16 V.S.A., Section 166(b)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The Mt. Mansfield Winter Academy is an independent day and boarding school providing educational services for up to 50 male and female students in grades 7-12. The school was founded in 1993 and has grown steadily over the past 23 years. MMWA offers a five month program augmented by a summer school option in France. The academy is a private, independent school that provides a quality academic program for student-athletes competing in winter sports at the elite level. Each student is treated as a unique individual, fostering academic excellence, athletic commitment, independence, responsibility, respect and confidence. The ambition of the Mt. Mansfield Winter Academy is to provide the support and direction necessary for each young person to achieve his/her personal potential, goals and dreams. Peter B. Gilmore visited the school on behalf of the Agency on March 15, 2016.

GENERAL EDUCATION: REPORT OF FINDINGS

1. The description of the school in the Application, and on the admissions brochures is accurate. The mission and philosophy of the school are clearly

presented on the website and serve as the guides for all aspects of life at the school. These tenets are reviewed regularly by administration, faculty, and the Board of Directors.

2. All students leave their “home” schools in November, attend MMWA until April, and are reintegrated back in their schools for the spring quarter each year. As students are enrolled in a traditional public and/or private schools for part of the academic year, and at the academy for five months, MMWA uses whatever curriculum those school supply. Therefore the course of study is highly individualized and determined by the specific needs of each child as every course is taught as a “one-on-one” teacher to student session. If the home school refuses to send a curriculum (a rare occurrence) the academy will supply a standard course of study that is age and ability appropriate. Students therefore typically have over 13 hours per week of teaching – an amazing feat that is guaranteed to enrollees. The exceptional flexibility of the administration and staff allow this individualized approach to work. The school makes available the support services necessary to meet the course of study and its educational purposes including (a) library services through books on site and guided access to the internet, (b) administrative services and facilities including on-site administrators, computer databases for tracking information, emergency and safety plans, set schedules, etc., (c) counseling and medical services using a cadre of nearby professionals, and (d) records both electronic and paper that are stored in safe locked files on site or in password protected locations in the cloud. This educational approach, combined with daily elite ski instruction, is highly effective at providing student athletes with an excellent college preparatory education as well as the ability to participate in the highest levels of age-appropriate competition.
3. The campus is basically self-contained and located at a site with easy access to the ski mountain nearby. Four main buildings and a new insulated yurt have the classrooms and facilities necessary to carry out the school mission and programs. There is enough classroom space within the buildings for the students to enjoy the daily tutorial work, and each of the teachers and administrators has sufficient office/working space as well. The buildings meet relevant health and safety standards as represented by updated certificates of inspection. The main building has classrooms, a kitchen and dining area, central gathering areas, office/meeting areas. Boarding facilities are located upstairs. There is emergency, safety, and evacuation plans for each building. The three A-frame buildings on campus are somewhat worn facilities currently used for a variety of academic, athletic, and administrative means. The yurt is a newer facility and serves as teaching space throughout the term. There seems to be little deferred maintenance and the overall feel is a warm, homey atmosphere.

4. The school employs a professional staff in sufficient number who are qualified by training and experience in the areas in which they are assigned. All the general education staff has at least a bachelor's degree in their field of instruction and some hold Masters degrees in related areas. Upon interview, the long term staff at MMWA proved to be experienced, dedicated, professionals. They each have backgrounds applicable to the needs of the students with which they work and experience teaching the age groups they encounter. Staff appropriately oversees the students during the entire school day and evening. The staff at the Mount Mansfield Ski Club handles oversight and instruction on the mountain each day. As most students do not have cars they are dependent on the school for transportation everywhere, although seniors do enjoy limited open campus privileges. The professional development at MMWA is appropriate to the teaching and training techniques used with the students. Most professional development takes place during the "off season", but there are sessions sponsored directly by the school as well. Teachers felt supported by the school in this regard. Both teachers and staff expressed their love of working at the school feeling that it provided a safe, academic, supportive, and happy place to work.

5. The back office administrative systems at MMWA are secure and appropriate for the running of the organization. On and off-site databases serve as secure storage for admissions and contact information, daily attendance along with all biographic information on students and families, academic records, immunization records, performance tracking, etc. The school employs a bookkeeper who maintains an accounting system of accounts payable, accounts receivable, budget tracking, and payroll. There is a yearly budgeting process that involves the main administrators with input from the staff. Review of a recent budget and other financials were made available and assured that all is financially intact at the school.

The Mt. Mansfield Winter Academy is an organization that is committed to serving this select population of student-athletes in an individualized and very successful way. There were many stories of successful students competing in the highest levels of ski competition, and students feeling well prepared for college too. The staff spoke of loving their professions and many spoke of feeling a strong sense of purpose in their jobs as well as wonderfully strong support from the organization. The environment in which they teach is unique in that there are no classes larger than one or two students, but again, they all spoke of feeling happy to work there. The staff members are held to high standards and they know what is expected of them. It is easy to see how this quality approach to education and athletics reflects the hard work of these dedicated professionals, and why students and families return year after year to gain from it.

Students at MMWA are challenged in the classroom and on the ski slopes every day. Day students continue their studies each evening with plenty of homework, and the

boarders attend a 90 minute study hall throughout most of the week in the evenings. This school requires dedication to serious academic study, as well as simultaneous dedication to serious athletic competition. The school is well designed, well facilitated, and most importantly well lead, to allow students to thrive in these ways.

COST IMPLICATIONS: none

STAFF AVAILABLE:

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