

AGENCY OF EDUCATION  
Barre, Vermont

**TEAM:** School Finance

**ITEM:** Will the State Board grant year-round renewal of general and special education independent school approval, to serve male students in grades 2-12 within the disability categories of Intellectual Disability, Specific Learning Disability, Emotional Disturbance, Other Health Impairment, Developmental Delay, Multiple Disabilities, and Autism Spectrum Disorder, to Kindle Farm School of Newfane, VT?

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

**That the State Board grants year-round renewal of general and special education independent school approval, to serve male students in grades 2-12 within the disability categories of Intellectual Disability, Specific Learning Disability, Emotional Disturbance, Other Health Impairment, Development Delay, Multiple Disabilities, and Autism Spectrum Disorder, to Kindle Farm School of Newfane, VT. 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 any changes occur in enrollment, programs, policies, facilities, financial capacity, staffing, or administration, during the period of approval.**

**STATUTORY AUTHORITY:** Title 16 V.S.A., Section 166 (b)  
State Board Rule: 2228 et.seq.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Kindle Farm School currently serves 48 male students in grades 2-12 who have experienced trauma or disruption in their lives that significantly impairs their participation in a traditional school environment. Founded 20 years ago to serve male students with emotional issues, it has evolved from being a primarily behavioral service to a sound therapeutic school with an excellent academic component. Since 2010 Kindle Farm School has been a division of Health Care and Rehabilitation Services (HCRS) of Southeastern Vermont, which has had several advantages. While the school operates as an independent school, HCRS is responsible for clinical services, financial management, including access to Medicaid, and IT services.

On behalf of the Agency, Brian Morgan visited the school on May 6, 2016.

**GENERAL EDUCATION REPORT OF FINDINGS**

1. Kindle Farm School was last granted renewal of approval by the State Board of Education on June 27, 2011 through June 30, 2016.

## 2. Description of Facilities.

Elementary, middle, and individualized needs programs, as well as administrative offices, are housed in a two-story wood framed building in Newfane Village, known as “Kindle Farm Central”. Each of the three classrooms accommodates up to six students and four teachers and each classroom has two smaller rooms attached to serve as break-out rooms. A kitchen and an “all-purpose” room that houses the school library are also located on the ground floor. Upstairs houses the administrative offices, a conference room, and rooms for one-on-one sessions. Kindle Farm Central currently serves 13 younger students. It also has its own Program Supervisor, as does the Onyon Farm campus, a short distance further down Rte 30.

The Onyon Farm campus of Kindle Farm School sits on 100 acres and houses the other 35 older students in the high school program. The farmhouse includes a sizable kitchen that is very close to a completed enlargement project. One senior is engaged on an “internal” internship with a master craftsman on this enlargement project. This reviewer visited a physics class that was studying Newton’s Third Law of action and reaction, and it was gratifying to witness the students’ engagement and willingness to interact. The one exception was a young man who was at Kindle Farm School on his very first day, but the three other students in the class will no doubt quickly serve as role models. Two other smaller classroom buildings are nearby, as well as two yurts. The larger yurt can comfortably accommodate the entire school for community meetings. It also accommodates musical instruments. The smaller yurt is a classroom. Another locked building serves as a garage and tool storage space.

The steep, hilly 100-acre farm provides space adjacent to the school buildings for a very extensive vegetable garden and two greenhouses, built by students. There is also a farm stand run by students. The chef in the kitchen makes very good use of the produce from the gardens. The remainder of the 100 acres provides recreational space for bike trails and native plants. The school also collects sap for maple sugaring, tapping about 400 trees.

The school facilities meet local, state, and federal health and safety regulations, are handicapped accessible on the ground floors, and are adequate for programming needs. A Certificate of Occupancy from the Division of Fire Safety is on file.

## 3. Minimum course of study as prescribed in 16 V.S.A. §906.

The new position of Curriculum Coordinator has allowed for a thorough revamping of the curriculum, as well as better supervision of teachers. Kindle Farm School used to use the Oak Meadow curriculum, but found that it did not go far enough, and did not always prepare students adequately for re-integration into their home school districts. While the school now keeps Common Core central to the curriculum, it includes projects, as well as reflection on the learning process. The school has begun with its science curriculum, and it will continue across the curriculum in the next couple of years. The outcome of the relatively recent focus on learning is apparent: students are enjoying their learning and applying their learning to a variety of projects. Kindle Farm School certainly provides a minimum course of study as prescribed in 16 V.S.A. §906.

## 4. Staffing: adequacy; qualifications; professional development.

There are ten members of Kindle Farm School’s administration. Each ‘campus’ includes a campus supervisor and a special educator. There are 14 members of the HS/MS staff, 3 multi-

age staff, 10 in the HS/MS Individualized Needs Program (IN), 6 in the Multi-Age IN Program, and 3 specialists – reading, music, culinary arts. The staff is qualified by degree and training for their respective positions. HCRS provides clinical/therapeutic support, a part-time vocational specialist, and IT support.

5. Financial capacity and audit.

Kindle Farm School submitted information about its financial capacity for the period of approval and is deemed to be healthy.

6. Student attendance records. Fire drill records.

Attendance and fire drill records were reviewed and found to be in good order.

7. Operating schedule. Number of instruction hours.

Kindle Farm maintains a year-round operating schedule.

8. Policies: admission, discipline, harassment/hazing/bullying.

Kindle Farm School has comprehensive handbooks, both for employees and for students and families that include policies for admission discipline, and preventing/reporting of harassment/hazing/bullying.

9. School improvement plans

Kindle Farm School plans on continuing and completing its curricular revamping. It plans on rebuilding its sugar house next year. It dreams of consolidating its school facilities on the Kindle Farm School site and selling the Newfane property. Administrators and staff toy with the notion of expanding enrollment by beginning co-education, but there are no concrete plans in this regard at this time.

10. Summary

During the visit it was apparent that every student was joyfully engaged in whatever class or activity they were doing. Kindle Farm School is a happy place, and it is no surprise that some are eager and willing to commute up to 90 minutes to be here. About 25% of students hail from New Hampshire, as far away as Claremont, for example. The evolution of the school from a primarily behavioral institution to a school in almost every sense of the word has energized the staff, many of whom have been at the school for a very long time, and has gained renewed respect in the surrounding community.

11. Recommendation

I recommend that Kindle Farm School be renewed for another five years.

## SPECIAL EDUCATION REVIEW FINDINGS

Special education policies, procedures and staff licensures were reviewed. All policies and procedures are aligned with special education regulatory requirements. This includes policies in

regard to discipline, suspension and expulsion, and the school's least restrictive environment practices which fully align with federal and state regulations. Unless otherwise stated within the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP), Kindle Farm School's graduation requirements, by policy, are identical for all students. All special education staff hold appropriate and current licensure for the positions they are assigned. Most of the related services required by students are provided through LEA contracts with individual, licensed professionals who either provide direct service to the student or provide consultation to Kindle Farm School staff. Kindle Farm School operates as a division within the Health Care and Rehabilitative Services (HCRS) Office of Windsor and Windham Counties and offers counseling and support services to its students through its on-site HCRS school clinician.

All current students are enrolled at either the Onyon Farm Program site or the Individual Needs Program site (located at separate campuses) and attend the school through a Local Educational Agency (LEA) referral and LEA tuition support. Programming ranges from providing students with the essential elements necessary for daily living needs to academic support for a student currently dually enrolled in Community College of Vermont courses. A great deal of effort has been made to increase the scope and rigor of the academic program offered by Kindle Farm School and the students' progress and pride in performance was evident in observations and communications with the students.

Kindle Farm School has a long and successful internal agriculture, forestry, and carpentry program that many of the students participate in at various levels. In addition, the school also has collaborations with local businesses to provide pre-vocational and work study/internship opportunities for its older students. A few students have also accessed the local Career and Technical Education center for additional vocational training.

The Kindle Farm School's special educators coordinate and communicate with the student's LEA throughout the referral process and are active participants in the LEA's development and revision of the student's Individualized Education Program, as well as the re-evaluation of students for special education eligibility through their contact with an assigned LEA case manager. The transition of students to the Kindle Farm School is completed with great care to ensure that the path is a purposeful and positive experience for the student, the families, and the sending LEA staff.

Kindle Farm School is currently approved for the disability categories of:

1. Intellectual Disability
2. Other Health Impairment
3. Specific Learning Disability
4. Emotional Disturbance
5. Autism Spectrum Disorder

The school seeks to continue serving students with these disabilities and add the disability categories of Developmentally Delayed and students identified with Multiple Disabilities. The school seems very capable to accommodate for the needs that typically are addressed by both of these disability categories. In the special education site review of the school, conducted on May 4, 2016 by VTAOE Program Coordinator Ernest Wheeler, it was noted that besides the internal trainings, staff has also been invited to access some trainings provided by the local education agency. The school also has long-standing relationships with area experts that provide the staff with both professional development opportunities and also serve as consultants to the programs.

For some related services which Kindle Farm School does not maintain professional staff, such as speech language pathologist or occupational therapists, the sending local education agency

provides the related service through a contract with their staff or with other local professionals.

The school provides a caring and appropriate educational environment for students otherwise challenged by a public school placement and the VTAOE endorses its continued approval as an independent school serving a special education population.

**COST IMPLICATIONS:** None

**STAFF AVAILABLE:**

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