

AGENCY OF EDUCATION
Barre, Vermont

TEAM: School Finance

ITEM: Will the State Board of Education grant renewal of general and special education independent school approval to serve students ages 5-14, within the disability categories of Specific Learning Disability, Intellectual Disability (mild), Emotional Disturbance, Speech or Language Impairment, Other Health Impairment, and Autism Spectrum Disorder (high functioning), to the Baird School in Burlington, VT?

SECRETARY'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

That the State Board of Education grants renewal of general and special education independent school approval to serve students ages 5-14, within the disability categories of Specific Learning Disability, Intellectual Disability (mild), Emotional Disturbance, Speech or Language Impairment, Other Health Impairment, and Autism Spectrum Disorder (high functioning), to the Baird School in Burlington, VT. This approval is for five years, through June 30, 2022.

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

STATUTORY AUTHORITY: 16 V.S.A. § 166 (b)
State Board Rule 2228 et. seq.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

1. Baird School is one of four independent schools operated by the Howard Center, and the only K-8 school of the four. After grade 8, most students transfer to Jean Garvin School or to Centerpoint School. Occasionally a student will return to the sending school district. Baird closed its residential facility last year, thus this is the first year of all day student enrollment. A small handful of students who need to transfer to residential care each year have to go out of state, usually to Massachusetts, to find it. The school has a capacity of 52 students. On the day of the visit there were 42 students enrolled, 31 boys and 11 girls. Enrollment is always in flux, however. There have been five new students in the last six weeks. While this visitor witnessed a couple of unhappy students, most students were happily engaged in classroom activities. Baird School's therapeutic milieu is designed to build social, emotional, behavioral, and academic competence. Its

Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Model is implemented school wide. MTSS integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level instructional system to maximize student achievement and reduce behavior problems. Curriculum and instructional practices are research based, aligned with Common Core and incorporate differentiated instruction. Baird School was formerly known as the Baird Center for Children and Families, but in July 1994 the Baird Center and the Howard Center were merged, along with a third organization, Champlain Drug and Alcohol Services. Major changes in the school took place five years ago after the last state approval, mostly in the academic arena but also in staffing, for example, from one sole clinician to six clinicians.

2. The State Board of Education last granted renewal of independent school approval to Baird School on May 15, 2012 through June 30, 2017.
3. The Baird School was visited on behalf of the Secretary of Education by Brian Morgan on Wednesday, March 29, 2017.
4. The school occupies part of the first floor of a brick, steel, and cinder block structure erected in the fall of 2002. There is a separate entrance to the school. Within the school there are four doors that have a delayed egress: the main entry, the exit by the kitchen, the west and south side exits in the gym. The building also houses administrative offices and office space for other programs operated by Howard Center. The facility utilized by the Baird School meets state and federal health and safety regulations and is handicapped accessible. Included in the school building are:
 - Six classrooms designed to serve 8-10 students each. Each classroom has its own private bathroom accessed from within the classroom. Each classroom is very well equipped with Smart Board, projector, furniture, etc. and each classroom, as well as hallways, are colorfully decorated,
 - A middle school regulation sized gym with two bathrooms and a shower, and an office for the physical education teacher and teaching interventionist,
 - Outdoors there is a basketball court, a play field, a playground with multi-function play apparatus, six raised garden beds, and storage sheds,
 - Two sensory spaces,
 - One seclusion room for students who need to be fully removed from the primary school area due to safety concerns,
 - A maker lab for student projects,
 - A literacy lab,
 - A teen zone - a recreation room for Middle School students,
 - A library with 2,500 volumes (library also serves as the primary conference room),
 - A professional kitchen for food preparation, and
 - A health office for the school nurse.
5. The minimum course of study, as prescribed in 16 V.S.A. § 906, is provided and adapted to the age and abilities of the students. Five years ago a very clear curriculum was introduced that was based on what was working well in sending public schools. The new director also introduced very structured monitoring systems for student progress, replacing what had formerly been unstructured student outcomes. These programmatic

changes led to a number of teacher changes, mostly voluntary resignations. The Multi-Tiered System of Support model within a multi-level instructional system seems to be very effective.

6. The school has the resources including financial capacity and qualified staff to meet its objectives. The staff includes six classroom teachers; six school clinicians, 13 behavior interventionists, four special educators, two teaching interventionists, an assistant director, clinical director, educational director, school nurse, physical education teacher, an operations coordinator, and a director.
7. The health, safety, attendance, and assessment records were reviewed and found to be in good order. The school's electronic record keeping is impeccable.
8. The school maintains an operating schedule that includes a total number of instructional hours each year that is not less than that required of a public school serving the same grades.
9. The school has a policy on prevention and reporting of harassment, hazing, and bullying that is as stringent as the Agency's model policy.

Baird School is a thoroughly professionally run school, where the interests of the student always come first.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

The Baird School is seeking re-approval in the areas of; speech or language impairment, autism spectrum disorders (high functioning), intellectual disability (mild), emotional disturbance, other health impaired and specific learning disability. The Baird School, located in Burlington, Vermont, was visited by Agency of Education staff on 4/18/17. Currently there are 44 Vermont students receiving educational services at Baird School. The students are grouped roughly by age and ability, are taught by lead teachers with the support of clinical, special education and related services staff. The facilities were bright, clean and the amount of space is appropriate for the number of potential students. The space has the resources to provide academic, behavioral, and community education as well as the opportunity for kinesthetic movement and exercise. The design, layout and organization of the space is flexible and conducive for teaching a wide range of students and for creating a variety of working environments.

During the visit the Agency employee interviewed staff, toured facilities, observed staff/student interactions and reviewed student files and IEPs. Observations and file reviews were conducted for a selection of Vermont students based on their sending school and their disability category. The staff was engaging, knowledgeable, cooperative and professional. Baird School staff reported a positive and collaborative working relationship with Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) to support the student's educational programs, although did note that paperwork, especially concerning re-evaluations and updated Individualized Education Plans (IEPS) are not always provided in a timely or accurate manner.

Staff professional development and training take the form of a general Howard Center training in a variety of topics and then specific new hire training in teaching and behavioral principals, as well as ongoing support and observations from supervisory staff. All staff receive crisis prevention and emergency response guidelines through Therapeutic Crisis Intervention and Life Space Crisis Intervention®. Staff reported feeling supported with on the job training with specific students and behavior plans as well as on-going feedback during observations and meeting times.

The following rules were reviewed for compliance:

2228.1 – MET– The Baird School demonstrated the policies, procedures and staff training to support students in the disability categories of; speech or language impairment, autism spectrum disorders (high functioning), intellectual disability (mild), emotional disturbance, other health impaired and specific learning disability.

2228.3 – MET – Observed written policies and/or procedures in the areas of: (1) admissions, (2) least restrictive environment, (3) discipline, (4) graduation, (5) faculty qualifications, and (6) faculty-student ratios.

2228.3.1 – MET – Evidence of minimum maintenance of (1) educational records, and coordination with LEA and parents through data and file review, (2) participation in evaluation and IEP procedures through IEP review, (3) implementation of IEPs through progress reporting and behavioral data.

2228.3.2 – MET – Special education teachers, and speech-language pathologists were licensed by appropriate local state agencies. Current staff have completed the requirements outlined in Rule 4500 as related to training for staff involved in restraint and seclusion protocols.

2228.4 – MET – Policies, procedures and written agreement outline tuition and establish division of legal responsibilities with regards to students on IEPs.

Based on the rules for special education approval for independent schools, the Baird School has met the minimum requirements for independent school approval.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS: none

STAFF AVAILABLE:

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