

AGENCY OF EDUCATION

Barre, Vermont

TEAM: School Finance

ITEM: Will the State Board of Education grant renewal of general independent school approval, to serve students in grades K-12, to Rutland Area Christian School, Rutland, VT?

SECRETARY'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

That the State Board of Education grants renewal of general independent school approval, to serve students in grades K-12, to Rutland Area Christian School, Rutland, VT. This approval is for five years, through June 30, 2022.

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

STATUTORY AUTHORITY: 16 V.S.A. § 166 (b)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

1. Rutland Area Christian School (RACS) is an independent, interdenominational, co-educational Christian school, operated cooperatively by an association of members. It offers pre-school, kindergarten, elementary, middle school and high school education. The school's academic, social and spiritual growth is guided by the principles and values revealed in scripture. The school opened its doors in 1993 and initially operated as a recognized independent school. Rutland Area Christian School is a member of the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI). The school's educational objectives include but are not limited to providing its students with a traditional and diverse educational experience that meets the highest standards of excellence; providing opportunities for social and spiritual growth, as well as academic progress. The school currently serves 56 students in grades K-12. The school is equipped to serve up to 150 students. The school owns the building and rents a small portion of it to another organization.
2. The governance of the school is conducted by a Board of Directors consisting of at least four but not more than seven persons. The Board of Directors has responsibilities in the areas of education, finance, public relations, building and grounds. The principal and the associate principal attend board meetings and help to set the agenda. The Student Council also may address the school board with any concerns and suggestions.

3. **Daily Program:** The daily program included all the subjects and special classes one would expect in a school setting including, but not limited to, basic communication skills including reading and writing; mathematics; physical education and health; English, American and other literature; science; fine and performing arts; citizenship and history and government; Spanish; keyboarding; wood shop; religious studies and of course lunch. The school provides many learning experiences outside the four walls of the school via a wide variety of field trips.
4. **School Site Visit:** On behalf of the Secretary of Education, Steve Lorenz visited the school on May 23, 2017. Mr. Lorenz was greeted upon arrival by the Associate Principal. The Associate Principal was on morning duty supervising students who were early arrivals as part of their early drop off program. The Principal and Associate Principal gave me a tour of the school and presented me with the day's visitation schedule. The remainder of the day consisted of visiting lower school classes and upper school classes; meeting/interviewing a lower school and upper school teacher. The day concluded with a review of policies and manuals, and other school records. The schedule provided by the school allowed me to get a full sense of the rhythms of the school day and to experience how the school did in fact provide academic, social and spiritual growth as guided by the principles and values revealed in scripture.
5. **Description of Facilities:** Rutland Area Christian School is located in the former Abraham Lincoln School in Rutland City and has been in its current location since 1998. The original brick structure was built in 1896 with a wing added in 1965 providing more than enough space to house the preschool and K-12 classes. The building also houses a multipurpose room that serves as a gymnasium/auditorium/lunch room, a reading lab, an art room, a fully equipped science lab, a library, and a computer lab. There is a fenced in play area on the property. The facility is adequate to meet the needs of the students, and the building meets all state and federal health and safety regulations. A copy of the Certificate of Occupancy (CO) was available. Portions of the building were handicapped accessible, and is adequate to meet the needs of the students.
6. **Minimum Course of Study and Required Asset 16 V.S.A. §906.** A minimum course of study of learning experiences adapted to a pupil's age and ability in the field of basic communications skills etc. was evident at RACS. A very detailed and in-depth description of the curricula was submitted in the application and from the onsite visit, it is clear the curriculum is age and ability appropriate. The curriculum is aligned with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The staff adapts the curriculum when appropriate to meet the needs of each student's learning profile including students who have IEPs or 504 plans.
7. **Staffing - Adequacy; Qualifications; Professional Development:** The number of staff and faculty at RACS is 25 full and part-time staff/faculty with the Principal teaching health and acting as the Director of the Preschool/Kindergarten. The Associate Principal teaches social studies for 9-12th graders. The job descriptions (roles and responsibilities and resumes) were available, complete and up to date.

Mr. Lorenz's observations and interviews indicated a high level of skill knowledge and practice of the school's philosophy and core values, understanding of the curriculum, a collaborative spirit, and respect for individual learning styles of each of the students at the school. All stakeholders I talked with knew the mission, the core values and educational objectives of the school.

RACS teachers are encouraged to seek and engage in professional development opportunities that enrich their teaching and support the mission of the school. Each year the staff are encouraged to set goals with the principal and lay out that which they are going to be working on in the coming year. The principal through observation and conversation in the next year is able to track the progress of that staff member. The Professional Learning Committee meets on Wednesdays to work with each other on what is working in their classrooms and to collaborate on how to have the most success in their classrooms. Recently, teachers have focused their professional development on how to better differentiate instruction and work with students with ADD and ADHD. Teachers are encouraged to attend the ACSI Teacher Annual Conference and to use their on line website material to further their skills as teachers. Staff supervision and evaluation happens in both a formal and informal way on a regular basis.

8. **Financial Stability and Capacity:** RACS placed in the application and had on site a signed letter dated February 28, 2017 from a VT certified public accountant firm that has prepared the 990 for the RACS for the past several years, which confirmed the school is solvent and has the financial resources available to pay continuing expenses. The 990 and the most recent profit and loss statements and balance sheets were available for review at the visit.
9. **Student Attendance and Assessment Records - Fire Drill and Safety Records:** These records were reviewed and found to be in very good order.
10. **Operating Schedule; Number of Instructional Hours:** The school maintains an operating schedule that includes a total number of instructional hours each year that is equivalent to a public school serving the same population.
11. **Policies - Admission, Health and Safety, Discipline, Harassment/Bullying:** Review of the school's handbook and emergency and safety procedures reveal that the school has developed policies for health and safety, admission, discipline and more. The school has a policy on prevention and reporting of harassment, hazing, and bullying, mandatory reporting of child abuse (as well as training) and all other policies required and desired to operate a school efficiently, effectively and safely.
12. **School Improvement Plans:** No plans for physical plant improvements were shared with the reviewer or were indicated in the report.

Summary and Recommendation

The Rutland Area Christian School provided a complete and detailed renewal application. The site visit was set up in such a way that the reviewer was able to sample, observe and discover all that makes RACS a school true to its mission and core values. I had adequate time to observe classes and to meet with faculty and administrative staff. I was very impressed with the focus, engagement, kindness and politeness of the student body.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS: none

STAFF AVAILABLE:

Cassandra Ryan, Finance Analyst
(802) 479-8545