

AGENCY OF EDUCATION

Barre, Vermont

TEAM: School Finance

ITEM: Will the State Board of Education grant renewal of approval as an independent kindergarten to the Mary Johnson Children's Center, Middlebury, VT?

SECRETARY'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

That the State Board of Education grants renewal of approval as an independent kindergarten to the Mary Johnson Children's Center, Middlebury, VT. This approval is for two years, through June 30, 2019.

Approval is subject to the condition that the school immediately report to the Agency of Education where 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) (1)
State Board Rules 2270-2275

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

1. In 1970, a group of concerned Middlebury residents decided the community needed a safe, supportive program for the children of families who needed to work outside the home. The Middlebury Day Care Center was created as one of the earliest full day, full year programs for working parents in Vermont. Now known as Mary Johnson Children's Center, the Center houses several other programs, which support children and families. The programs are not conventional or fixed but support the importance of play and evolve depending on the interests of children, teachers, and families. The guiding principles are drawn from those of the Center: emphasize child-centered growth and development—physically, socially emotionally, and cognitively—and respect individual needs. The Center serves children ages four and five, and occasionally a six year old through its part-time and full-time program options.
2. Mary Johnson Children's Center is licensed to operate an early childhood program by the Department of Children and Families, Child Development Division, is a Five-Star recognized program, and is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The Vermont State Board of Education has continuously approved Mary Johnson Children's Center since 1988.
3. On behalf of the Secretary of Education, Brynne Reed and Pat Pallas Gray visited Mary Johnson Children's Center on May 9, 2017.

4. Mary Johnson Children’s Center is located in a renovated farmhouse building in a residential neighborhood in Middlebury. The first floor houses the preschool program and the office. The kindergarten is located on the second floor and is accessible via an elevator, if needed. The kindergarten environment includes several attached rooms and changes according to the curriculum needs. The playground is well equipped and surrounded by a fence, providing a variety of opportunities for learning and play. A large basement room provides an indoor space for gross motor activity used during inclement weather. A small wooded area located nearby — “Little Woods” — has become an active playground space used twelve months of the year for nature play. Nature play and the outdoors is a strong and vital part of the school’s curriculum. The building is handicapped accessible, meets all state and federal health and safety regulations and is adequate to meet the needs of the preschool and kindergarten programs. A Certificate of Occupancy (CO) from the Division of Fire Safety is on file at the school and at the Agency.
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. The curriculum is based on the philosophy that children learn best through action, interaction, and experience. The staff participate in many in-service training programs, which are designed around the importance of process-oriented play in children’s learning. The basis for this approach relies on observation and picking up on cues from children, with the teacher acting as a facilitator. Most activities are open-ended and encourage the child to think, create and problem solve. At the time of the visit, there were 17 children enrolled, but there were no children of kindergarten age.
6. The Center’s four- and five-year old classroom is staffed with a lead teacher, who is licensed in early childhood education, and three associate teachers. The Center’s two co-directors oversee the staff. All staff members are well qualified for their positions. The Center believes that given appropriate materials, well-defined spaces and a qualified, observant and sensitive staff, the primary learning at the kindergarten level will be achieved through play.
7. The health, safety, attendance and assessment records were reviewed and found to be in good order.
8. Mary Johnson Children’s Center has a policy of prevention and reporting of harassment, hazing, and bullying that is as stringent as the Agency’s model policy.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS: None

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