

INDEPENDENT SCHOOL GENERAL EDUCATION REVIEW

Approval Recommendation: Grant renewal of general education independent school approval for five years, through June 30, 2022. Approval would be subject to the school complying with the assurances as outlined in the General Education Approval Application during the approval period.

School Description: LiHigh’s educational philosophy is to develop and support each student’s sense of worth and ability. The mission of LiHigh School is to develop an individualized learning plan around the passions interests, and special needs of each student, in order to produce healthy, productive, and passionate lifelong learners who are motivated to contribute something meaningful to the world. To accomplish this, every student at LiHigh pursues specific goals related to their academics, their social-emotional development, and their ability to transition into a post-secondary path of his/her choosing. LiHigh gets its name from the Chinese concept of “li”. Li can be understood through the way in which jade carvers work with the precious stone. The skill of the best stone carvers was to recognize the inherent beauty of each individual piece of jade and to carve in such a way as to allow the jade’s essence and beauty --its li—to emerge. So it is with the students at LiHigh. The school currently serves 29 students (19 special education students; ten general education students). LiHigh School opened in 2010.

Review Findings: The school operates essentially out of two buildings on Main Street in Poultney. The main building—the former rail depot—consists of five 1:1 classroom spaces, a small-group space/conference room, and a commercial kitchen. The main building also serves as the home based for students in the Therapeutic Program, while the kitchen serves as the home base for the Culinary Program.

Across the street at 188 Main Street, LiHigh rents rooms #6, #7, and #12 in the Poultney Small Business Center. Room #6 is a small-group classroom, #7 is used for 1:1 classes, as well as for meetings with the school counselor, and #12 is a large space that serves students in the Progressive Program. In recent weeks, the school opened the Localmotive Cafe on the ground floor of the building. The cafe provides a living laboratory for the development of students’ social-entrepreneurial and job/career skills. St. Raphael’s Parish Hall at 21 East Main Street is used for an athletics-based and movement-based workshop, theater workshops, community events, as well as small-group classes.

Camp LiHigh in Wells is a seven-acre site that includes access to forests and a private pond. The camp is used throughout the year to support programming related to the Outdoor Leadership Program, Therapeutic Program, Progressive Program, and Culinary Program. Classes and workshops are also offered on topics related to ecology, sustainable building, and organic gardening and wild edibles.

General education students are also required to take courses in junior and senior years at Green Mountain College. These dual-credit courses are offered at a much-reduced tuition for LiHigh students.

Both school buildings meet all state and federal health and safety regulations and the depot building is handicapped accessible. Certificates of Occupancy are on file at the Agency.

The minimum course of student, as prescribed in 16 V.S.A. §906, is provided and adapted to the age and abilities of the students. The objective of LiHigh School is to develop individualized learning plans around the passions, interests, and special needs of each student, in order to produce healthy, productive, and passionate lifelong learners who are motivated to contribute something meaningful to the world. This objective requires that teachers be facilitators of learning and discovery. Teachers are not only deliverers of curriculum-approved content, but also a student's partner in learning, instructing the student in how to learn. While classes focus on covering specific content, they begin from a desire to use project-based learning as the primary method of learning. In addition, the school encourages all the students to participate in internships with professionals in their fields of interest so that they can receive hands-on experience in an authentic setting. To support this process, the school divides students into three different phases: Students in Communications, Empirical Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning, Social Reasoning, and Personal Qualities (time management, organization, sense of responsibility, etc.) Phase 2 students are given responsibility over their education. Phase 3 students strive to become truly independent learners. The goal of Phase 3 is for the student to develop a senior capstone project that will make the world a better place. To achieve this, Phase 3 students are required to coordinate with individuals and entities outside of LiHigh School. The successful completion of the senior capstone project, along with a student's portfolio of accomplished work, demonstrates the student's readiness to graduate from LiHigh School.

The school has the resources including financial capacity and qualified staff to meet its objectives. The sixteen staff members listed in the application are very qualified and very passionate about the mission of LiHigh School. The visitor observed a genuine mutual respect between staff and students. A review of the balance sheet and the profit/loss statement verified the conclusions of the certified public accountant whose

notarized letter was submitted with the application for reapproval that indicates that the school is financially sound.

The health, safety, attendance, and assessment records are in good order. Fire drill and evacuation drill records are also in good order.

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.

The school has a policy on prevention of harassment of students that is as stringent as the Agency's model policy.

Summary: LiHigh School is a vibrant learning community where students are genuinely excited about their learning and about their responsibility to the community. The school's records, policy handbook, etc., are all in impeccable shape. The opportunities that students have for internships, individual projects, and dual-credit courses at nearby Green Mountain College constitute a huge plus for this progressive school.

Respectfully Submitted:

Brian Morgan
May 9, 2017