

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 in grades 7-12, in the disability categories of Specific Learning Disability (SLD) and Other Health Impairment (OHI), to **The Sharon Academy**, Sharon, VT based upon the review by the Agency of Education and notification of continued New England Association of Schools and Colleges' (NEASC) accreditation?

SECRETARY'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

That the State Board of Education grants renewal of general and special education independent school approval to serve students in grades 7-12, in the disability categories of Specific Learning Disability (SLD) and Other Health Impairment (OHI), to The Sharon Academy, Sharon, VT based upon the review by the Agency of Education and notification of continued New England Association of Schools and Colleges' (NEASC) accreditation, for a term through June 30, 2023.

That the school reports to the Agency of Education within five business days 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. The Sharon Academy (TSA), founded in 1996, is a co-educational day school serving students in grades 7-12.
2. TSA is currently approved in the disability categories of Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) and Other Health Impairment (OHI).
3. TSA is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), which is an accrediting body recognized by the State Board of Education pursuant to SBE rule #7320. Other than routine annual reports, the next major responsibility regarding accreditation will be the decennial evaluation in 2023.

4. NEASC, as part of its accreditation review, assessed financial capacity. The Sharon Academy has satisfied NEASC's requirements, and the Agency recommends that the State Board support NEASC's findings of adequate financial capacity for the purposes of State Board approval.
5. The Sharon Academy has a policy on the prevention and reporting of harassment, hazing, and bullying which is as stringent as the Agency's model policy.

Independent School Special Education Review Report

REPORT

August 14,
2018

THE SHARON ACADEMY

**Submitted by
Special Education Review Team**



Approval Recommendation

Five year special education re-approval in the disability categories of: other health impairment (OHI) and specific learning disability (SLD).

In addition, the AOE recommends that The Sharon Academy consistently implement the following prior to its next review:

- a) Ongoing documentation system to confirm delivery of all IEP services. The documentation system should include:
 - a. Name of student
 - b. Service being provided
 - c. Service provider
 - d. Date of service
 - e. Time/Length of service

- b) Educational Agreement with Local Education Agency (LEA), signed and dated prior to the provision of services, that includes:
 - a. Amount of Tuition
 - b. Services Provided
 - c. Additional Costs
 - d. Services not included and descriptions of how/if those services might be obtained alternatively
 - e. Termination Clause
 - f. Signature
 - g. Date of Signature
 - h. Student Name
 - i. School and LEA Names

- c) Non-Instructional Agreement initiated with LEA within 30 days of enrollment and provision of IEP services

Rationale

Based on the rules for Special Education Approval for Independent Schools, The Sharon Academy did not adequately meet expectations upon the visit date. The review found that data and documentation were missing to confirm service delivery, some agreements were unsigned or undated, and some agreements were signed after the start of services. Based on post-visit submissions June 21, 2018 and July 13, 2018 from The Sharon Academy, the Agency of Education finds that corrective actions made in the short term have alleviated the concerns and therefore allow The Sharon Academy to continue serving students it is currently approved to serve. The Agency will review in five years to ensure these recommendations are implemented systemically.

School Description

The Sharon Academy accepts students in 7-12th grade, whose primary disability is one of the following: other health impairment (OHI) and specific learning disability (SLD). Currently, The Sharon Academy serves 105 students enrolled in high school and 33 students enrolled in middle school. Of those students, six have an IEP with specific learning disabilities and two with other health impairment.

Review Description

The Sharon Academy, located in Sharon, Vermont, was visited by Agency of Education staff on May 3, 2018. According to student records, there are eight students receiving special education services at this school. During the visit, the Agency employees interviewed staff, toured facilities, observed staff/student interactions, and reviewed student files and IEPs. File reviews were conducted for eight students. The students reviewed qualified under the disability categories of other health impairment and specific learning disabilities.

Review Findings

2228.1 – The Sharon Academy demonstrated the policies, procedures, and staff training to support students in the disability categories of: other health impairment and specific learning disability.

2228.3 – The Sharon Academy demonstrated 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 – The Sharon Academy did not demonstrate sufficient evidence in all of the following; minimum maintenance of (1) educational records, and coordination with LEA, (2) participation in evaluation, and IEP procedures, (3) implementation of IEPs.

Note on Evidence

Based on a review of eight student files, school documentation of schedules, staffing interviews, and Non-Instructional Agreements, services listed on IEPs were unable to be confirmed, as the comprehensive documentation system was missing the length of time determinations. Post-visit submissions (6/21/18, 7/13/18) included a plan for updating their documentation form that met expectations.

2228.3.2 – The Sharon Academy meets expectations regarding licensed staff. Special education teachers were licensed by the Agency of Education.

2228.4 – The Sharon Academy did not demonstrate policies, procedures, and written agreements outlining tuition and establishment of the division of legal responsibilities concerning students on IEPs.

Note on Evidence

During the visit, two agreements were not signed by LEAs, two were signed after the start of services, the agreement template used by Sharon Academy did not specify the services included in the costs, and are not student specific. In post-visit submission (6/21/18, 7/13/18), there was a plan for updating the agreement to include additional costs (if applicable), services not included, a termination clause, and date of signature. Sharon Academy also submitted a plan for ensuring the agreements were signed before the start of services and the Non-instructional agreement is signed within 30 days. The submitted plan met expectations for approval.

Questions: Contact Chris Kane at chris.kane@vermont.gov

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS: none

STAFF AVAILABLE:

Cassandra Ryan, Fiscal and Regulatory Compliance Coordinator