

AGENCY OF EDUCATION
Barre, Vermont

TEAM: School Finance

ITEM: Will the State Board of Education grant renewal of year-round approval to **Liberty High School** of Brattleboro, Vermont, as a Distance Learning School designed to serve students 18 years of age or older who do not have a high school diploma?

ACTING SECRETARY'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

That the State Board of Education grants renewal of year-round approval to Liberty High School of Brattleboro, Vermont, as a Distance Learning School designed to serve students 18 years of age or older who do not have a high school diploma. This approval is for a five-year term through June 30, 2023.

That the school reports within five days to the Agency of Education whenever changes occur in the program's policies, facilities, staffing, and administration, during the period of approval.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY: 16 V.S.A. § §166(b)
State Board Rule 2231

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

1. When owner/Director, Paul Zazzaro moved his business from CT to VT in 2001, he incorporated his business as American Educational Institute of Vermont, Inc., doing business as Liberty High school. Liberty High School (LHS) was granted initial year-round Distance Learning School approval in 2004, and has been continuously approved since that time.
2. The school's educational philosophy is to provide, for the benefit of adults unable to complete their secondary schooling, sound distance learning education programs formulated especially for the distance education student and conforming to Vermont educational standards.
3. The State Board of Education last granted year-round distance learning independent school approval to Liberty HS on August 20, 2013 for five years through June 30, 2018.
4. LHS was visited on behalf of the Commissioner by Brian Morgan on June 22, 2018.

5. The school's business and administrative office is located in a 1,000 square foot space in the North Village Green Building on Technology Drive in Brattleboro, VT. The facility meets all state and federal health and safety regulations and is handicapped accessible.
6. Liberty High School offers a curriculum that meets the requirements of the minimum course of study, as prescribed in 16 V.S.A. § 906, which is developed and assessed by the academic consultants at the school. The school's curriculum mirrors the typical four-year high school program, and graduation requirements are equally traditional. Students may complete this course work either electronically or as correspondence courses. Textbooks and course materials are included in course fees. The average course has 14-16 units of study with 3-4 lessons per unit. Students take lesson tests on a regular basis to monitor progress, and each course includes a final exam. Liberty HS grants credit for successful work at other institutions, so the school offers three possible programs: Senior Year Option (5 courses); Basic Program Option (6-10 courses); Extended Program Option (11-20 courses), each culminating in the twenty (20) required credits for graduation.

Upon completion of requirements for graduation, a final transcript is prepared. In the event of the school's closure, policies and procedures are in place to assure the transfer of records to another institution or the Division of Public Records.

7. The school has the resources including financial capacity and qualified staff to meet its objectives.

The school is currently staffed by four faculty and three student advisors in addition to the Director, an Office/Accounting Administrator, a Registrar/Admissions Director, and a keeper of Student Records. All faculty have a minimum of a Bachelor degree in the discipline they teach. All employees work on an hourly basis, which enables budgetary flexibility if/when necessary.

A review of the balance sheet submitted with the application for re-approval indicates that the school is financially sound, based on the flexibility of the budget to contract and expand, if/when necessary. The school currently has 385 enrollees and expects to graduate 180 this year. At any given time, however, up to 80 enrollees are inactive for various personal and/or financial reasons. To replace the 180 graduates, the school needs to enroll 25-39 new students a month to stay even. This does not appear to be a problem, since the demand is there.

8. Liberty High School has policies and procedures to assure timely response to questions that students may have. A 3-day turnaround time is expected for student work. All these policies are stated clearly on the school's thorough website, and for those who do not have access to the internet, in the school's printed materials that were included in the application for re-approval. Similarly, policies and procedures for refunds for incomplete enrollment are readily available. Student accounts are never put into collection. All payment plans are interest free.

In summary, Liberty High School fills a void and meets a need in our educational framework. It is unique. Moreover, its operations are transparent, and its programs are successful for a large number of students across the country.

I recommend that Liberty High School be re-approved for another five-year period.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian Morgan - June 24, 2018

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS: none

STAFF AVAILABLE:

Cassandra Ryan, Fiscal and Regulatory Compliance Coordinator