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Sent: Wednesday, December 21, 2022 8:35 AM
To: Samuelson, Jennifer <Jennifer.Samuelson@vermont.gov>
Cc: Gary Blodgett <gblodgett@esblackriver.org>; Kendra Rickerby <krickerby@esblackriver.org>; Leadership Team <leadershipteam@esblackriver.org>
Subject: ESBR Approval Statement From Trustee Board Chairperson

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Dear State Board of Education,

I am Gary Blodgett, Board of Trustees, Chairperson of the Expeditionary School at Black River. The Sub Committee of the Board of Education met with our board, Head of School, and three parents/guardians to review our visitation report so they could make a recommendation to the full Board of Education. This was Monday night. We were extremely grateful for Mr Lovett's effort to have our meeting since we submitted our initial application 19 months ago.

After a wonderful presentation from the three parents/guardians about how ESBR was meeting their needs and the hope that their tax dollars would follow their children's education, the Sub Committee heard from the Visitation Team. This team made their recommendation to not approve our application, **based on their visit last March.**

I believe this approval system is flawed. We are a beginning school, just in our third year, with lots to learn. Although we took issue with some of the visiting team's findings, we did learn from the report, which finally reached our hands, and have made many adjustments. The current system, to our knowledge, does not have follow up visits to see if corrective action has taken place. It is a snapshot from that one day. Because of this current process, the Sub Committee also declined to approve our application. The Chairperson encouraged us to quickly resubmit a new application with the corrections that are in place and have another visitation. It was his recommendation and hope that this new application would be expedited, noting the lengthy process to this point. We appreciate his hope. As Chairperson of the Board of Trustees, I was frustrated with this result. Our local community, like many in Vermont, was an unfortunate result of a good idea for trying to make taxes more equitable in the state. As Ludlow's taxes increased, and home values increased, many local, middle class families left and our price per pupil increased leading to the closure of our middle and high school. A group of citizens wanted to give our town a local school option based on the Expeditionary model. This citizen board has been working hard to develop a flexible pathway to graduation. They have fund raised for three years, and have indeed graduated 3 students.

As a retired teacher, principal and coach and one who understands the stresses on our young people today, from Covid restrictions on their young lives, bullying, political division, among other things, I have been encouraged by what our students say and what those parents and guardians said to the subcommittee. I do feel like ESBR is making a difference in these students' lives and that we are on the right track. For that, and how the Chairperson felt the process should be a speedier one, I am encouraged.

We would be much better off with the added state dollars that these parents pay, but we will continue to fund raise and will resubmit our application.

Thank you for your time.

Gary Blodgett
Board of Trustees, Chairperson

Sent from my iPhone