

Independent School Review Report

General Education & Special Education

REPORT

November 18,
2021

Maplehill School
Program Renewal & Amendment

Submitted by

Independent School Review Team Members:

General Education Representative:

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Special Education Representatives:

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Site Review Scope of Work & Purpose

This report will address both the required program renewal for Maplehill School as well as address the school's request to add an elementary program to the currently approved middle and high school special education program.

General Education

School Philosophy & Educational Objectives

Vermont Rule 2226.2

Members of the agency's Independent School and Special Education teams met with Maplehill School staff on Thursday, November 18, 2021. Interviews were conducted at three school sites in Marshfield and Plainfield. Maplehill School personnel present for interviews were the education program director, two general education classroom teachers, curriculum director, the licensed special educator, a behavior specialist, the school's licensed social worker and a member of the school's governance board. Class observations for English and math were conducted at the main school building located at 1343 East Hill Road in Plainfield.

The addition of an elementary school program will not change Maplehill School's philosophy or stated educational objectives; it will serve to expand academic and support objectives based upon identified need and requests from placing Local Education Associations (LEAs).

School Philosophy

Maplehill School's renewal application states that:

"Our mission is to provide real-world educational experiences where students and adults gain practical skills and personal successes. Through the acquisition of academic, vocational, and social skills, students are prepared for a return to a less restrictive setting, further education, training, employment, and independent living."

The school's director communicated that part of Maplehill School's success is that all the staff, instructional and support personnel "believe in honoring people for who they are, in recognizing individual strengths and nurturing potential, that students learn in a multitude of ways, that students have widely varying skills, abilities, and interests."

Educational Objectives

Visiting agency staff confirmed Maplehill School's educational objectives include a variety of research-based, best practices such as differentiated instruction, project-based learning, Common Core curriculum, service-learning activities, and utilization of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support. Additionally, the program is currently transitioning toward implementing Proficiency Based Graduation Requirements for the middle and high school programs. Embedded in all areas of Maplehill School's learning programs, are trauma informed and social emotional

practices as well as evidence-based behavioral interventions that provide additional supports to close student achievement gaps.

If approved, the addition of an elementary program would create opportunities to provide student interventions for younger students, fourth through sixth grades, with the primary goal of transitioning students back to placing LEAs. Additionally, Maplehill School is one of the few non-designated agency approved special education schools that provides on-site, clinical treatment services for students and their families, by a licensed permanent staff member. The addition of an elementary program at Maplehill School, will afford students important access to treatment interventions at a younger age, ensuring a more robust process for closing academic achievement gaps.

One of the elementary program objectives is to offer students with access to the school's community-based educational opportunities as well as focused individualized academic supports for completing education requirements specific to each student's individualized education plan (IEP).

Central to Maplehill School's educational objectives are the methods for "teach[ing] nurturing and restorative practices, self-reflection, clear empathic communication, [and] personal resilience. Our curriculum blends traditional academics with experiential learning and a course of study tailored to students' interests and curiosity. We are committed to land-based learning that is rooted in milieu therapy and nurturing authentic relationships between students, staff, volunteers, and community members. Students who are successful at Maplehill School tend to be more responsive to relationship-based intervention than behavior modification. Students work to gain re-entry into their sending school, or to graduate from Maplehill School."

Governance	<i>Vermont Rule 2226.4</i>
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Maplehill School is a non-profit that operates under the umbrella of Elmhill, Inc. The organization's stated objectives are to provide "educational services to children, adolescents, and young adults with Special Education needs through three programs: The Elementary Program, Small Group Program (SGP) and the Individual Care Program (ICP)." (Source: Maplehill renewal application, 11-18-2021)

Maplehill School's governance requires Board membership be comprised of an "odd number of trustees numbering neither less than 5 nor more than 15, unless there is an unfilled vacancy." Due to unfilled vacancies, Maplehill School's board has six representatives that provide oversight and serve in an advisory capacity for the executive director. Board members review a list of potential candidates for election to fill vacancies during the annual meeting.

Board members are elected to terms of three years and may serve up to three terms as a member of the board. Board members whose terms of service have expired may be renominated after a gap of one year in service as a governance board member. The governance section of Maplehill School's operation's manual states that "[w]hen appropriate, the board may appoint certain members to one-, two- or three-year terms, to ensure "balanced attrition." Board policies and

procedures are in place to effectively address board member retention, recruitment activities and if necessary, removal. Maplehill School's bylaws contain expectations regarding professional conduct, and how to address conflict of interest. There are several current Board members who, in advisory capacity, also volunteer services, on-site for both programs, in a variety of ways.

School Enrollment	<i>Vermont Rule 2226.4</i>	<i>16VSA §166(b)(4)</i>
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Agency review of intake documentation in conjunction with staff interviews, confirmed that student enrollment is completed in compliance with SBE Rules and statutes. Once approved, Maplehill School's elementary program will follow a traditional school calendar, of 179-181 days. Students may attend the extended-year program offered if required, and as determined by the student's education team. Maplehill School's students are primarily enrolled by sending LEAs and state placement through the Department of Children and Families.

Maplehill School's current milieu-based student program is currently approved to serve twenty-two students in grades seven through twelve. The one-on-one program is approved to serve twenty students in grades seven through twelve. Maplehill School is requesting, as part of their program amendment request, to receive State Board approval to serve a maximum elementary student capacity of twelve to fifteen students in grades four through six. The elementary enrollment process will also follow current referral procedures like the middle and high school programs: LEA referrals, local schools and the Department of Children and Families.

The AOE review team conducted interviews with the program director and the licensed social worker, responsible for school to home service coordination. Maplehill School's student files and information utilizes a thorough system for securing enrollment documentation and ensures confidentiality of referred student and family information, both digitally and in paper form. Additionally, student records comply with Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requirements for on-site storage, limiting personnel access to a per-need basis.

All of Maplehill's school programs have developed a model for establishing and maintaining appropriate staffing levels to respond to fluctuations in student census for all three programs. The school's executive director is in regular contact with AOE Independent School Team members regarding student enrollment, staffing and other required State Board, statutory and agency policy requirements.

Minimum Course of Study & Required Assessments	<i>Vermont Rule 2226.5 16 V.S.A.</i>
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Maplehill School is currently working to implement a robust, high-quality proficiency-based curriculum in all core, elective and life skill program areas. Proficiencies will be the basis for “instructional planning and assessment beginning in July 2021 and include performance indicators for 4 levels of instruction and assessment. Appropriate performance levels for each student will be decided upon within Personal Learning Plan (PLP) meetings as well as in IEP meetings.” (Source: Maplehill School renewal application, 11-18-2021)

Instructional and support staff employ a variety of methods for delivery of educational services that includes access to a traditional classroom environment, individualized student or one-on-one direct instruction, and community-based education programming, as needed. Interviewed staff members indicated that current program practices utilize community partners to enrich and support life, job and social skills curricula that include authentic assessments.

Students in Maplehill School’s elementary program will have access to licensed behavior specialists and well-trained behavioral interventionists who develop, implement, monitor, adjust student support services and curriculum, if required make utilizing evidence-based, best practice behavioral interventions.

There is a formalized plan in place for implementing and supporting state assessments for current Maplehill School programs and that will be implemented for the elementary-based program, once approved by the State Board. State assessment testing is accommodated to respond to student specific accommodations, per IEP or 504 Plan requirements.

The AOE’s site review teams were provided access to review student files, IEPs, individual learning plans and provided access to transition plans. Maplehill School students preparing to return to placing LEA receive transition services to ensure successful reintegration upon return to the sending school. Maplehill’s transition plan process for all students and management of their academic progress, special education, treatment, and behavioral transitions are thoughtful, comply with State Board Rules, statutory and IDEA requirements.

Professional Staff	<i>Vermont Rule 2226.8.1</i>
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Many of Maplehill’s instructional staff assigned to core area academic programs hold a Vermont educator’s license in area of specialty, and all staff meet State Board qualifications to serve as teachers. Special education teachers hold a Vermont license, and the program has a sufficient number of licensed special educators on staff to provide direct services and staff supervision at both the milieu-based, one-to-one program and for the new elementary program. All students will have access to a licensed Speech and Language Pathologist, and an occupational therapist, as required by student individual education plans (IEP).

All members of Maplehill School's staff engage in annual professional development for therapeutic crisis intervention training, evidence-based behavioral interventions, special education, and content area development.

The director of Maplehill continues to prioritize professional development opportunities during in-service days, by inviting outside professionals to campus and ensure that all staff who wish to be licensed will remain current with licensure and to continue professional knowledge in their service area, including all support staff, as appropriate for each position. In addition to supporting content area professional development opportunities, Maplehill's administrators provide whole staff training on relevant subjects including, but not limited to special education, trauma informed classroom management techniques, evidence-based behavioral interventions, core curriculum development, authentic assessments, and the on-going transition to Proficiency-based Graduation Requirement curriculum development.

Staff curriculum vitae and professional development records are up-to-date and readily available for review in the main administrative building. All staff files contain copies of annual evaluations which incorporate goal setting, identify areas in need of improvement, a list of staff strengths and professional achievements.

Staff engage in robust staff meetings with mandatory attendance by classroom teachers, special education teachers, clinicians, and other relevant personnel. Student progress is reviewed as well as academic assessments, behavioral and treatment programming. Staff meeting schedules include brief daily end-of-the-day progress meetings to specifically address student needs, regular review academic progress data, and weekly meetings to determine if additional treatment services are required to ensure student success. A progressive, consistent, and well-developed program of school to home case management, for both the milieu-based and individual program students, ensures academic and treatment offerings remain current, relevant and adequate to meet student progress needs as well as provide continuity of case management services between the two programs. Maplehill's elementary program will provide the same level of education, if approved by the State Board of Education.

Each member of the staff interviewed were able to articulate effective processes for adapting curriculum to meet individualized student IEP goals and social/emotional/behavioral objectives. Effective methods for providing direct instruction in traditional class setting, small groups or as part of intensive one-on-one programming is leveraged daily and aligned with student IEPs, 504 Plans and treatment plans. Maplehill's administration works closely with the Department of Children and Families to ensure treatment goals for each student is actualized with fidelity.

Facilities	<i>Vermont Rule 2226.3</i>
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Classroom spaces, at Maplehill School's current program locations, are well organized, clean, welcoming and display student work throughout the facility. Much attention has been given to both school buildings to create a calm, welcoming and supportive environment for students and

staff. Each location includes sensory rooms, cafeteria, safe outdoor areas, and other required program spaces. Additionally, both programs have access to the Marshfield music, physical fitness, art studios and the new industrial arts, small engine repair and vocational arts building, also located at the Marshfield campus.

The farm barn, animal pens/areas are all in good repair, meet best practice standards for clean animal husbandry practices. Additionally, Maplehill School's staff work diligently to ensure a safe environment that allows enrolled students to meet curriculum expectations, including authentic assessments. All agricultural areas are consistently supervised by appropriately educated and experienced agricultural staff as well as local professionals. Staff and students undergo strict safety training and have access to first aid equipment and supports, if required. Students actively participate in the farm to school program by engaging in the planning, development, and meal preparation portions of the program.

There is sufficient space to maintain academic, behavioral, mental health treatment programming, and at this time all Maplehill School's program sites meets facility requirements and have provided the Agency of Education with certificates of occupancy, as required.

The Independent School Team reviewer toured the site identified as the location of the elementary program. Planning for retrofitting the building, located on-campus at Goddard College, is underway and careful consideration has been given to ensure the facility meets all school building requirements including fire, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) access and egress, emergency exits, construction materials with low chemical emissions and appropriate lighting, heat, and water.

Health & Safety	<i>Vermont Rule 2226.7</i>
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Emergency Services:

Each month all occupants, at each Maplehill School location, practice fire and emergency safety evacuation protocols. A plan is in place to work with local officials to develop lock-down and shelter in place protocols.

All staff members are trained or participate in annual refreshers for CPR and First Aid with specific emphasis on immediate response to student crisis and injury, as well as regular medical interventions. Proper protocols are in place for ensuring compliance with blood borne pathogen and disposal of sharps.

Parents, guardians, or custodial adults will be informed of health, medical and program safety protocols, procedures and annually provided with a copy of all program policies at the time of student enrollment.

Nursing Services and Medications:

The Maplehill School does not have access to licensed nursing staff. However, designated staff members are trained in proper dispensing of student medications, maintaining a medication administration record of information and for keeping the medication in a locked cabinet. Student immunization records are contained in a secure, confidential locked filing system and the files are up to date.

Staffing Safeguards:

Background checks are conducted prior to start date for all newly hired employees. Fingerprint supported criminal record checks and Vermont adult/child abuse registries are checked annually. Both reports are contained in a confidential filing system available for review upon request.

Maplehill School has adopted the Agency of Education's anti-bullying, anti-hazing and anti-harassment policies and includes this information in the staff, student and family handbooks. Procedures for these policies are reviewed by all staff annually during August in-service. All staff receive professional development that ensures proper management of student educational spaces and staff offices. Maplehill School staff do not restrain or utilize seclusion practices and instead, utilize on site clinical staff to provide age and grade level appropriate de-escalation techniques.

Furthermore, staff members are trained annually on a variety of treatment, academic and social/emotional/behavioral interventions and have a thorough understanding of the required strength-based approach toward discipline of children and youth who have varying degrees of adverse childhood experiences, and complex trauma. All staff training includes consideration of student IEP and 504 Plan objectives.

Mandatory Reporting Procedures:

Maplehill School has implemented and published mandatory reporting procedures and expectations in the staff handbook. Included in the policy are provisions for reporting child abuse and the circumstances in which a case must be reported to school administrators and appropriate authorities. Staff participate in required annual refreshers for policy on mandatory reporting during August in-service staff development. The school's handbook includes information regarding the photographing or video recording of any child without express written consent from designated guardian or primary family member.

Special Education Report

SCHOOL: Maplehill School

DATE: 11-18-21

STATE REG	NOTES/EVIDENCE
<p>2228.1: Essential Special Education Supports</p>	<p>Maplehill School’s special educators, along with campus coordinators, deans of students, classroom teachers, and instructional assistants demonstrated exceptional ability to meet the following essential special education supports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialized instruction • Structured daily schedules • Training to differentiate, modify curriculum and setting specific to needs of students • Student participation in peer groupings • Facility modifications based on needs of the population • Access to related services as indicated in IEP (through sending schools) • Assistive technology as deemed necessary • Support with communication needs • Behavioral supports (including BCBA consultation weekly and text support as needed) • Trauma-informed staff and instructional practices • Sensory-based supports • Motor planning supports as necessary
<p>2228.2: All students receiving sped services must be eligible under the disability categories for which school is approved</p>	<p>All students receiving special education services at Maplehill School are eligible under the disability categories for which the school is approved (Autism Spectrum Disorder, Emotional Disturbance, Intellectual Disability, Other Health Impairment, Specific Learning Disability, Traumatic Brain Injury).</p> <p>The school is seeking approval to serve students eligible under the category of Developmental Delay, but their elementary program will serve students in grades 4-6, beyond the level at which this category applies, so that will not apply to this approval.</p>
<p>2228.3: Maintenance and implementation of written policies and procedures for:</p>	<p>Admissions: One of Maplehill School’s special educator participates in all aspects of students’ admissions process and the staff members collaborate as a team at least weekly regarding incoming students. The school’s 4-step admissions procedure is thorough and exceeds the agency’s expectations.</p> <p>Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): for the elementary program, the conversation about LRE will begin during the</p>

enrollment process. As a team, they will discuss the transition beyond 6th grade to clarify hopes and expectations, with the goal of transitioning students back to the public school setting as early as the team agrees there is a high likelihood for success. For the other two Maplehill School programs, students' IEP teams meet at least annually to discuss the Least Restrictive Environment. While the least restrictive setting may not always be a return to the public school, students at Maplehill School have ample opportunities to engage in programming across campuses, in the vast outdoor settings that make up the larger Maplehill School campus, and in the larger community through job placements, drivers education classes, accessing community supports and tech centers, etc.

Discipline: Maplehill School is relationship-oriented and they use trauma-informed approaches to support students in using strategies to regulate as well as a restorative practice approach to repair physical or interpersonal damages caused by their behavior and restore the environment. Staff members have ample and ongoing professional development to maintain and further their level skills. Staff members receive training in Therapeutic Crisis Intervention and Rule 4500 as well.

Graduation: Maplehill School has established strong ties to the LEAs that send students to their school. They work with each student's team to guarantee diploma and secondary transition plans. Maplehill has gone to great lengths to improve their skills and practices in terms of proficiency-based goals for students who are not functioning at grade level, using bands or access points to get students where they need to be for PBGRs, differentiation, and backward design. These efforts are in the initial stages, but are commendable.

Faculty Qualifications: Maplehill School employs two licensed special educators and plans to hire another when they open their elementary program. Their in-service training is robust and has equal emphasis upon mental health/wellness/social emotional learning and curriculum design and evaluation.

Faculty to Student Ratios: Maplehill School exceeds the agency's expectation for faculty to student ratios and each student is surrounded by a team of staff members with various areas of expertise.

<p>2228.3: Coordinate with sending school, responsible agencies, parents regarding educational records, evaluations, IEPs, transition planning, change of placement</p>	<p>Maple Hill coordinates and collaborates regularly with the LEAs who send students to their schools.</p> <p>It is also clear from the interviews conducted that Maple Hill has invested a great deal of time and resources into staff development regarding curriculum design, universal design for learning, differentiated instruction, and assessment of student skills.</p> <p>The documentation provided by Maple Hill does not allow the Agency to confirm or reasonably conclude, however, that all IEP services are being delivered as written. In some cases, Maple Hill goes above and beyond what is written into the IEP (ex: direct instruction 5 times weekly vs 4 times weekly; weekly duration of 105 minutes of direct instruction vs 60). At times, students are receiving 1:1 instruction as opposed to small group instruction. In some cases, this increased intensity could be advantageous to the student, but in others it may run counter to the student’s expressed IEP goals and needs. The Agency is not in a position to comment on how these changes would impact the students in question.</p> <p>What is of greater concern is that Maple Hill provided conflicting information regarding the implementation of students’ IEP services. Some of the information provided by the special educators regarding timing and frequency of services differed when compared to the students' schedules that were shared with the AOE. In looking at the student schedules, it didn’t always “match up” with when services were said to having been delivered.</p> <p>Furthermore, there appears to be no documentation of service logs beyond a statement that “records of attendance and notes on student progress are kept in teacher classrooms.”</p> <p>In many cases, students at Maple Hill are having their services provided by general educators, instructional assistants, or other non-special education staff. While it is clear that a great deal of collaboration and professional development exists between the special educators and the rest of the staff, it is less clear exactly when, how, and to what degree of specificity consultation regarding each students’ IEP services and progress monitoring occurs.</p>
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	Based on these factors, the special education team at VT AOE suggests approval with follow-up actions to correct these areas of concern.
2228.3.2: Licensure Requirements	Maple Hill employs two licensed special educators and will hire a third when they open their elementary program. Classroom teachers, instructional assistants, campus directors, deans of students, and the executive director receive training, consultation, and collaborate fully as a team with the special educators.

Independent & Special Education Team Summary

Approval Recommendation

The Agency of Education’s Independent and Special Education review teams recommend granting maximum school renewal of five years as well as approval of amendment to add an elementary education program, at Maplehill School, for grades four through six. The special education team will work with head of school at Maplehill School to schedule follow-up technical assistance to address deficiencies identified under Rule 2228.3 regarding coordination of special education services.

Pat and Deb -

Looks great! No changes suggested.

I can sign the addendum when I get to the office this AM, and will get it your way.

Hope you both had a great weekend,

Joe

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On Jul 29, 2022, at 12:39 PM, Pallas Gray, Pat <Pat.PallasGray@vermont.gov> wrote:

Good afternoon, Joe,

I just left a msg on the school's phone. The draft report and an addendum document are attached. By State Board rule, you have 30 days to review the report for accuracy purpose. If, however you can review the report and send your response via email very soon—preferably by Monday, August 1—we are in hopes of getting the school's renewal request on the Board's August 12 agenda. If this isn't possible, please let me know and we will need to consider it for the meeting next month. Please do not make corrections to the draft report, just provide a list of any changes needed.

If you can get your response back to us by August 1, you need to know that we expect the Independent School Subcommittee of the State Board to meet on the morning of August 8. This will be followed up by the State Board meeting on August 12. Either you or a representative of Maplehill School will need to be available to answer any questions the Subcommittee or the State Board might have.

The addendum is a new document now required because of the independent school rules changing on May 10, 2022. Some of the changes went into effect immediately.

Looking forward to hearing from you regarding this matter.

Take care

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<Maplehill School Renewal Report FINAL.docx><Addendum for Indies May 2022.docx>