
611 VT Route 114, PO Box 228
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East Burke School Preliminary Response to Independent School Review Report (received 5-20-2022)

Report covering:

- *Initial renewal application submission from 1-31-2020*
- *AoE-requested resubmission of renewal application from 6-18-2021*
 - *Virtual review from 8-6-2021*
 - *On-site review from 10-26-2021*

Introduction

Although EBS is a small school, this review process has been complicated by having taken place during a pandemic and through a period of profound school change and renewal, in part stimulated by that pandemic. It is a testament to East Burke School that it is nimble and resilient, and was able to reexamine and renew its *raison d'être* and curriculum during a period of global adjustment to unprecedented challenges. East Burke is responsive to its students and to the times. Although it makes for a messy approval process, this is a point to be celebrated.

Having said that, the Agency of Education is right in expecting consistent documentation. Would the Agency consider highlighting areas of the initial application that are seen as being inconsistent with today's policies and practices and allowing East Burke to create an addendum to its application that highlights the exciting changes that the school has undergone since beginning its approval process?

In closing, I strongly believe that Vermont, our country, and world need divergent thinkers who can address the wide variety of unforeseeable issues facing humanity. Small, philosophically unique schools can do this by individualizing instruction to suit each student within the context of a unique school mission. East Burke seems to do exactly that and should, in my mind, be encouraged to continue to do so while addressing the Agency's concerns.

Sincerely,

Harry Chaucer
Castleton University
June 14, 2022

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Responses by Report Section

<i>Section</i>	<i>AoE Statement</i>	<i>EBS Response</i>
Site Review Scope of Work & Purpose	"...could not align program information obtained during virtual review with submitted support documentation or the general education renewal application."	Submitted documentation reflected the program as of January 31, 2020. In the year and a half between that submission and the virtual review, EBS changed its administration, underwent a complete mission and vision overhaul, and began developing and implementing a new curriculum. If we may be permitted to resubmit an amended general education renewal application as requested above, we can demonstrate the alignment that the state requires.
School Philosophy	[quoted text of previous EBS mission]	<p>This mission statement comes from January 2020. As of August 2021, the East Burke School mission is: "We prepare our students to confront 21st-century challenges through critical literacy, creative thinking, and collaborative action."</p> <p>Our new mission aligns with a new vision of EBS as a resilience school. Our vision reads: "We recognize that our youth will inherit a society in political, economic, and ecological crisis, and that facing these challenges will require bold and innovative action. Emphasizing Vermont's democratic values of freedom and unity, we cultivate a spirit of overcoming adversity among our students. Together with families and community partners, we are raising the next generation of Vermonters to steward our land and communities for the sake of generations to come."</p>

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<i>Section</i>	<i>AoE Statement</i>	<i>EBS Response</i>
		See document in shared Google Drive submitted on October 15, 2021: "EBS Family Handbook 21-22.pdf" page 7 (page 3 of handbook).
School Enrollment	"Agency of Education staff asked the school's administration to contact the LEA's administration and engage with responsible truancy officers to report identifying student information."	Please note that the EBS administration was already in contact with the LEA and student parents/guardians in reporting truancy and discussing next steps at the time of this request.
School Enrollment	"Under the school's current enrollment process, a parent/guardian contacts the school by phone, and a plan is made for the student..."	Please note that contact can be made by phone, email, Facebook, or in-person visit.
Minimum Course of Study & Required Assessments	"Students attend core subject classes for English, history, math, and science. Electives include languages, a variety of fine arts and student-centered high interest subject areas."	To clarify: languages fall under our heading of Global Studies, which is a core subject class. Wellness and Practical Arts classes meet weekly as well, and Wellness receives an additional short morning block three days a week for exercise. While students have input in requesting content and theme of classes, no class is an elective.

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<i>Section</i>	<i>AoE Statement</i>	<i>EBS Response</i>
Minimum Course of Study & Required Assessments	“Assessment methods at the East Burke School currently utilize narratives only.”	EBS provides quantitative and qualitative grading data from both formative and summative assessments within those narratives, along with regular feedback from teachers to students throughout each course. EBS staff also indicated the use of essays, projects, presentations, quizzes, tests, short writing assignments, and homework exercises.
Minimum Course of Study & Required Assessments	“However, when pressed to explain the qualitative and quantitative best-practices employed by academic staff to support progress report narratives, no explanation was provided.”	Narrative evaluation at East Burke is a powerful synthetic method of evaluation with a long tradition (see Hampshire College, for example). Where meaningful, the East Burke narrative references quantitative as well as qualitative measures. These narratives are archived, and we would be happy to furnish examples upon request.
Minimum Course of Study & Required Assessments	“The instructor assigned to teach math and science reported...”	Given that math and science are taught by two different instructors, we are uncertain to whom this sentence refers.
Minimum Course of Study & Required Assessments	“...unable to identify which Socratic curriculum was the basis for instruction and how it is appropriately adapted for IEP, 504 Plan students and with multi-graded classrooms.”	As two faculty members are graduates of the Great Books program at St. John’s College, EBS follows the St. John’s Seminar style of Socratic instruction. Staff provided a verbal explanation of how students of different needs and abilities can be accommodated during seminar and will be happy do so in writing as part of an amended renewal application. Please see <i>A Creative Approach to the Common Core State Standards</i> for a description of how teachers can effectively adapt seminar-style

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		instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners (Chaucer, 2012, p. 76-79).
Minimum Course of Study & Required Assessments	“Agency personnel asked for pre-teaching practices employed by staff to assist students with understanding Socratic instruction as well as requested examples of assessment standards that accompanied the school’s Socratic class instruction, including age/grade appropriate differentiation. No examples were provided by East Burke School staff members.”	<p>EBS staff explained a number of pre-teaching practices and offered to submit teacher-created guidance documents, introductory exercises, and assessment tools. AoE staff indicated that teacher-created assessment tools would not satisfy their request.</p> <p>Because our school is about the relationship between the student and teacher, teacher-made materials are essential to our operations: they allow for moment to moment, person by person differentiation in a way that published materials cannot. We would be happy to provide sample documents upon request.</p>
Minimum Course of Study & Required Assessments	“Additionally, the documents submitted did not align with staff interviews held during the virtual review on August 6, 2021.”	<p>We reiterate that EBS was in the midst of implementing a new curriculum beginning in the fall of 2021. As this report does not indicate what portions of documentation did not align with staff interviews, we cannot address specific concerns. If the AoE would be willing to indicate specific discrepancies, we will be more than happy to address them.</p>

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Minimum Course of Study & Required Assessments	<p>“Between August and early October, agency personnel provided on-going technical assistance...”</p>	<p>EBS staff are grateful for the time that AoE staff made to speak with us. We must note, though, that responses to our requests for assistance were often delayed (once by a full 30 days) and often left our questions unanswered. Most notably, when EBS staff struggled to understand particular requests made by the AoE in the summer of 2021 and requested sample documents to clarify their meaning, AoE staff stated that providing such samples would “put EBS at an unfair advantage” in the renewal application process.</p> <p>We understand that the AoE has been struggling with a backlog of work brought on by the pandemic. The combination of a heavy workload, limited in-person interaction, and unclear communication during this crisis seemed to severely limit the assistance that the AoE was able to provide to our school as we struggled to navigate the same global crisis.</p>
Minimum Course of Study & Required Assessments	<p>“A thorough review of the submitted curriculum revealed it did not align with information included in the renewal application, or with information obtained during staff interviews held on August 6,</p>	<p>We reiterate that EBS was in the midst of implementing a new curriculum beginning in the fall of 2021, and therefore would not be in alignment with documentation dating back to January 2020. As this report does not indicate what portions of documentation were out of alignment, we cannot address specific concerns.</p> <p>If the AoE is willing to provide us with a copy of the original renewal application with areas of misalignment concern highlighted, we will be able to ensure that</p>

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	2021, or throughout technical assistance sessions offered by Independent School personnel, August - October 18, 2021."	we address each specific concern in our amended renewal application.
Minimum Course of Study & Required Assessments	"At the beginning of the October 26, at the in-person review, AOE staff requested copies of lesson plans for scheduled observations in math and history. No lesson plans were provided for either content area class."	<p>Lesson plans in a format readable to outside observers are documents that EBS does not create unless outside observers need them. Please note that EBS staff had asked specifically prior to the October 26 in-person review whether the AoE observer would need to see lesson plans, and we received no direct answer.</p> <p>Given that lesson plan documents were not specifically requested and that we do not typically use them, we did not provide them on the day of the visit. However, since we do carefully plan and document each of our lessons for ourselves, we would be happy to transfer the lesson plans that we implemented on the day of the visit into a user-friendly format for review by AoE personnel.</p>
Minimum Course of Study & Required Assessments	"Observations for both the math and history class did not reveal obvious or discreet methods to accommodate students with IEPs, 504 Plans or for grade level specific	<p>Moment to moment differentiation is what East Burke is all about. Our multi-age structure allows students to learn from each other as siblings do while being presented with age- and development-appropriate teachings.</p> <p>The observer might have missed the specific indication by both the math teacher and the history teacher regarding levels of</p>

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	instructions, typical of a multi-age classroom."	<p>expectation for assignments, and also was unable to listen to the content of on-on-one discussions between teachers and individual students.</p> <p>In math class, for instance, students were reminded that they would be self-selecting into one of three levels of testing expectations, with different time allotments for each. These levels are based on both age and ability, with older students encouraged to take on the more rigorous challenges and allowances made for differing levels of ability. In history class, the teacher had discreet one-on-one conversations with students to differentiate and address individual needs.</p>
Minimum Course of Study & Required Assessments	"Due to the absence of available lesson plans, the Independent School Team member could not align class instruction with the curriculum documentation..."	<p>We reiterate that lesson plans for outside observers are not documents our teachers create unless we are aware of outside observers needing or requesting them. Please see earlier comment regarding our efforts to ask in advance of the in-person visit whether the AoE observer wanted to see lesson plans. We would be glad to create such lesson plans upon request.</p>
Mandatory Reporting Procedures	"Agency of Education site reviewer was unable to confirm if mandatory reporting training is conducted annually for all	<p>EBS had already submitted documentation of mandatory reporting training on October 15, 2021. See document: "EBS Mandatory Reporters.pdf"</p>

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	instructors and staff."	
Facilities	"The technology/radio room was dark, poorly lit, and unorganized as well. It was difficult to determine how this space is utilized as part of the curriculum or for high interest student electives."	The space is currently used only for individual music practice. We cannot recall being asked, but EBS staff would have happily answered that question at the time and are glad to do so now.
Hazing, Harassment & Bullying Policies	"Administrators of the school have a <u>draft</u> document that does not comply with required policy, as posted on AOE website for hazing, harassment, and bullying procedures. The school's administration currently shares the school's draft document of these policies with students, parents, and guardians in the absence of a complete school handbook."	Our policy document is a final policy. We believe that it complies fully with required AoE policies. If you believe that it does not, would you please tell us precisely where it does not comply? EBS does have a complete school handbook. The policy manual and the school handbook were submitted to the AoE on October 15, 2021. See documents: "EBS Policy Manual FY22.pdf" and "EBS Family Handbook 21-22.pdf"

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Independent School Team Recommendation	“First, the school does not meet the requirements to offer the minimum course of study as required by 2225.5 and 2226.3. The MCOS must be “adapted to a student’s age and ability” 16 V.S.A. 906(b).”	We have indicated a variety of adaptations to meet student needs based on age and ability, both in conversations with the AoE, in this document, and in our submitted documentation. See document: “EBS Curricular Plan Grade by Grade.pdf” pages 1-3, and the subsequent 62 pages of specific explanations.
Independent School Team Recommendation	“Second, East Burke did not provide evidence to demonstrate that the curriculum is adapted to student age, or that the offered MCOS is “age and ability appropriate” as required by 2226.2.”	Please help us understand how this concern differs from the previous concern. Again, see document: “EBS Curricular Plan Grade by Grade.pdf” pages 1-3, and the subsequent 62 pages of specific explanations.
Independent School Team Recommendation	“The school did not provide evidence that student progress is assessed according to a system of records maintained by the school as required by 2226.3.”	We are uncertain what the “system of records” refers to, as this has not been indicated clearly in the report until now. If it refers to the narrative evaluation reports that EBS uses to assess student progress, please see comment above regarding extensive explanations of quantitative and qualitative feedback EBS uses in these narratives. All narratives are archived and available for AoE review upon request.
Independent School Team Recommendation	“Finally, East Burke School is not compliant with	We have brought EBS into compliance this year. We had two students eligible for state assessments; one was unable to participate

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	the requirement to administer state assessment(s) to students whose district of residence pays tuition on the student(s) behalf under 16 V.S.A. § 166(g)."	due to medical leave, the other opted out of taking the assessment. EBS has submitted all necessary documentation and assurances as indicated by the AoE.