

AGENCY OF EDUCATION

Barre, Vermont

TEAM: School Finance

ITEM: Will the State Board of Education grant an amendment to the general and special education independent school approval for Ch.O.I.C.E (Changing Our Ideas Concerning Education) Academy in Barre, VT to enable this school to add a program called STARS School to serve a maximum of six students ages 6-22 in grades 1-12 in the disability areas of Autism Spectrum Disorders and Developmental Delay?

SECRETARY'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

That the State Board of Education grants an amendment to the general and special education independent school approval for Ch.O.I.C.E (Changing Our Ideas Concerning Education) Academy in Barre, VT to enable this school to add a program called STARS School to serve a maximum of six students ages 6-22 in grades 1-12 in the disability areas of Autism Spectrum Disorders and Developmental Delay. This approval is for three years through June 30, 2020, to coincide with the school's current approval period.

Approval is subject to the condition that the school immediately report to the Agency of Education 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. Ch.O.I.C.E. Academy is an integrated transitional mental health treatment facility and education center which serves child and youth in grades 5-12 within the disability categories of Emotional Disturbance, Specific Learning Disability, Intellectual Disability, Autism Spectrum Disorder (high functioning), Speech or Language Impairment, and Other Health Impairment. There are a number of therapeutic education services offered at the school through the following programs—the elementary/middle program, the general high school milieu, the School to Work Zone, and the Individualized Program (IP).
2. Ch.O.I.C.E. Academy requested an amendment to add the STARS (Specialized Treatment And Reaching Success) School to provide individualized academic, behavioral, and clinical support to

up to six students, with severe mental health and academic needs, who are developmentally delayed or on the Autism Disorder Spectrum (low functioning).

3. The STARS School will be located on Beckley Hill in Barre. Within the STARS School there is a shared classroom space as well as individual work spaces. There is a motor room with a suspended swing located within the space also. Additionally, there is a quiet space utilized for calming procedures and safety. There is another calming space off one of the individualized work spaces. There are fire exits off of the motor room, out the front door, and out the back door. A Certificate of Occupancy (CO) from the Division of Fire Safety for this facility is on file at the Agency.

SPECIAL EDUCATION:

The STARS School of Ch.O.I.C.E. Academy is seeking approval in the disability areas of autism spectrum disorders and developmental delay for a maximum of six students ages 6-22 in grades K-12. STARS, located in Barre Vermont, was visited by a special education consultant from the AOE on 12/14/16. Currently there are two Vermont students receiving educational services at the STARS site, under individual contracts with local LEAs. The students receive individualized services, with direct instruction from lead teachers and direct interventionists. The facilities are clean and the amount of space is appropriate for the number of potential students. The space has the resources to provide academic, behavioral, and community education as well as the opportunity for kinesthetic movement. The design, layout, and organization of the space is flexible and conducive for teaching a wide range of students and for creating a variety of working environments.

During the visit the AOE consultant interviewed staff, toured facilities, observed staff/student interactions and reviewed student files and IEPs. One observations and two file reviews were conducted for students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. The staff are engaging, knowledgeable, cooperative, and professional. STARS staff reported a positive and collaborative working relationship with Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) to support the student's educational programs, although did note that paperwork and communication can be slow at times.

Staff professional development and training take the form of a general new hire training in teaching and behavioral principals, as well as ongoing support and observations from supervisory staff. Staff are required to complete an orientation and training checklist upon hire, and to maintain annual trainings as well. STARS staff reported feeling supported with on-the-job training with specific students and behavior plans as well as on-going feedback during observations and meeting times.

The following rules were reviewed for compliance:

2228.1 – MET– The STARS School demonstrated the policies, procedures and staff training to support students in the disability categories of autism spectrum disorders and developmental disability.

2228.3 – MET – Observed 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 – MET – Evidence of minimum maintenance of (1) educational records, and coordination with LEA and parents through data and file review, (2) participation in evaluation and IEP procedures through IEP review, (3) implementation of IEPs through progress reporting and behavioral data.

2228.3.2 – MET – Special education teachers held valid, VT Educator Licenses endorsed in special education.

2228.4 – MET – Policies, procedures, and a written agreement outline tuition and establish the division of legal responsibilities with regards to students on IEPs.

Based on the rules for special education approval for independent schools the STARS School has met the minimum requirements for independent school approval.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS: none

STAFF AVAILABLE:

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