

Site Review

Renewal- Bridge School

Independent School Review Report General Education

Site Review Conducted - November 10, 2022

Submitted by Independent School Review Team:
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Site Review Scope of Work and Purpose

Bridge School is an approved general education school in Middlebury, Vermont that serves students in kindergarten through the sixth grade. Bridge School follows a traditional school year calendar. The head of school submitted a timely renewal application and all required supporting documentation in compliance with State Board of Education Rule 2227.

The Independent School Team conducted a renewal site review on Thursday, November 10, 2022 at the Bridge School.

General Education

State Board of Education Rule 2225.2, 2225.5

The Agency's Independent School Team met with Bridge School's staff to conduct class observations and interview staff members. Bridge School staff members present for the site review were the head of school and the instructors for grades K-1, 2-3, and 4-6.

School Philosophy

Central to Bridge School's philosophy is the importance of community learning. Both the school's website and renewal application emphasized that "At Bridge School, our mixed-age, close-knit, and supportive community provides the foundation for all learning. Our students develop emotional intelligence and social skills through joyfully learning and playing alongside a wide range of students. Students feel like they are part of a large family at Bridge School. We believe that when children feel supported and respected, they are naturally ready and eager to learn."

Program Objectives

Bridge School's academic objectives support and encourage student creativity and independent learning with emphasis on how to be a member of the school's community. Bridge School's application states that "Bridge School nurtures children's development as inquisitive scholars and kindhearted community members. Through collaborative, project-based, community-engaged learning, Bridge School cultivates children's natural curiosity, and joyful creativity. We value holistic learning, thereby fostering a 21st century learner's essential skills, knowledge, and habits of mind."

School Enrollment

16 V.S.A. §166(b)(4), State Board of Education Rule 2225.3

The head of school reported there are currently 28 students enrolled in the Bridge School. Parents enroll their child at Bridge School after submitting an application and completing the enrollment process.

The head of school initially reviews all submitted applications, meets with staff to review supporting documentation, and determines which students would be the best fit for the program. Parents and prospective students visit Bridge School and participate in interviews

with the head of school and instructional staff. An admissions team comprised of grade level instructional staff and the head of school meet to make final enrollment decisions. At the time of the visit there was an enrollment wait list for kindergarten and first grade.

Governance

State Board of Education Rule 2225.4

Bridge School's nine-member Governance Board includes a president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary. Members are elected to serve for three-year terms. The head of Bridge School is also a member of the Board.

Minimum Course of Study & Required Assessments

16 V.S.A. §166(b), State Board of Education Rule 2225.5

Bridge School follows a traditional school calendar. The curriculum utilizes a "constructivist, individualized model for teaching and learning." The head of school and instructional staff develop student learning during collaborative, school-wide in-service meetings. Grade level curriculum is planned and evaluated by instructional staff ensuring that it "...addresses the individualized needs of each student."

Bridge School incorporates project-based learning and Common Core instructional objectives and supports student Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs) that "begin with what each student knows already and builds from there." Curriculum units and lesson plans are differentiated to meet the needs of each student in multiple-age classrooms. The head of school documented that academic and enrichment class groups are "created solely on the basis of age; students' personal interests and strengths are equally important to Bridge School teachers."

Additionally, students and teachers are "engaged and challenged by meaningful, creative, hands-on learning experiences." Class instruction incorporates individualized student learning, direct instruction, student peer collaboration, and small group project work.

The Bridge School meets all State Board Rules for Minimum Course of Study.

Professional Staff

State Board of Education Rule 2225.8

Bridge School staff are qualified to teach in their assigned areas of responsibility. Teachers are encouraged to engage in regular content area and pedagogical professional development opportunities. Staff are also encouraged to focus on social emotional learning techniques to support delivery of curriculum.

In-service training at Bridge School is scheduled regularly during August in-service and throughout the school year. Opportunities are "unique to the needs of the staff by grade level and or within content area groups. Professional development includes topics such as differentiated instruction, project-based learning, outdoor education, and social emotional learning strategies.

Staffing Safeguards:

Bridge School's head of school and staff have undergone fingerprinting and child/adult registry background checks. Reports are filed in each staff member's professional file.

Mandatory Reporting Procedures:

Bridge School has published the school's mandatory reporting policy in all its handbooks and all staff members must attend annual refreshers during summer in-service training.

Health & Safety

A Bridge School staff member is trained in CPR and First Aid and participates in annual refreshers. Training certificates are included in staff professional folders.

The head of school consults with the local fire department and the Middlebury Police Department to practice monthly fire drills and other emergency service drills.

Nursing Services, Medications, and Immunization Records:

Bridge School does not employ nursing staff and relies upon 911 for emergency services. Each student's file includes parent emergency and medical permission forms. Student immunization records are up to date and included in official files with other health records and permission slips. Bridge School staff do not administer prescription medications; however, with parent/family permission can administer Tylenol/Advil or other over-the-counter medications, as needed. All medications are locked in a cabinet in the school's main office.

Hazing, Harassment & Bullying Policies

The Bridge School has adopted the Agency of Education's required policy on Hazing, Harassment and Bullying, and it is published in staff, family, and student handbooks. Staff receive annual refreshers on these policies during summer in-service.

Facilities

State Board of Education Rule 2225.6

Bridge School is located in a former dairy farm barn. The facility includes four "home center" classrooms, a gym with a basketball court and climbing wall, a theater for student performances, a cataloged library, and a shop/greenhouse/maker space for student projects. Outdoor spaces include a regulation size soccer field, a winter skating rink, a small stream and pond, and multiple playground structures. Students make daily use of the outdoor areas for either academic learning, physical education, or active play.

The facility has a hard-wired fire alarm system that is inspected annually. The school is changing from a boiler system to heat pumps. This is being done via a grant from Efficiency Vermont; this work has been completed for half of the facility. A Certificate of Occupancy (CO) from the Division of Fire Safety is on file.

Financial Capacity:

Bridge School provided a profit and loss statement and a balance sheet that indicates the school has the financial capacity to conduct its educational purposes for the period of approval.

Recommendation:

The Agency's Independent School Team recommends a five-year renewal of the Bridge School's independent school approval to the Secretary of Education. The school's academic program, facilities, and financial standing all meet State Board of Education requirements to operate as a general education independent school for students in kindergarten through the sixth grade.