
611 VT Route 114, PO Box 228
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East Burke School Response to Independent School Review Report (received 12-5-2022)

Report covering:

- *Amended renewal application submitted 8-26-2022*
 - *On-site review from 9-7-2022*

Responses by Report Section

Site Review Scope of Work & Purpose

AoE Statement: "...review was scheduled to specifically address program deficiencies identified during the school's required renewal visit on October 26, 2021."

EBS Response: Please note for the record that many of the deficiencies listed in the 5-20-2022 report were not accurate representations of EBS's program and did not reflect the extensive documentation submitted during and prior to October 2021. For more information, please see EBS's detailed response to the May report.

School Enrollment

AoE Statement: "Community based activities are scheduled on Fridays monthly throughout the school year."

EBS Response: Just to clarify: these activities are required experiential learning opportunities that include tours of colleges and technical education programs, museum and performing arts visits, physical wellness programming, service learning projects, and natural science encounters. They are curricular and mandatory for all students.

Financial Capacity

AoE Statement: "certified by Bill Mutschler, Treasurer on behalf of the Board of Directors (no longer with East Burked School)."

EBS Response: Bill Mutschler continues to serve as a member of the Board of Directors and its Treasurer. The previous Treasurer did not fulfill responsibilities adequately and resigned in June 2022. We remain grateful to Bill for taking lead on finances and helping the school to make significant improvements in its financial position (specifics below).

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AoE Statement: “the individual previously responsible for the school’s finances is no longer associated with the school. The position has not been filled, as of the date of the second visit.”

EBS Response: There are two positions involved here: Board Treasurer and administrative staff in charge of financial operations. Both individuals departed EBS at the end of June 2022. As noted above, Bill Mutschler now serves as our Board Treasurer. As with all staffing questions in an organization this size, all responsibilities for administration, financial and otherwise, have been absorbed by remaining staff. One of EBS’s hiring goals when seeking new staff will be to bring on someone specifically trained in financial operations. In the meantime, the Co-Head currently managing finances has already made significant improvements to internal documentation and budgeting, and both Co-Heads, in conjunction with our new Treasurer and consultant Cynthia Stuart, have improved fundraising and grant-seeking efforts dramatically.

AoE Statement: “AOE considers the financial position of East Burke School to be vulnerable”

EBS Response: Having enacted painfully austere measures to combat financial vulnerability in the past two years, we generally agree. We would like to include some updates from recent months regarding our financial position. Most of these developments are new since the AoE on-site review, so we note them as supplements to the report as it stands.

- Enrollment, our primary source of funding through school choice tuition, has increased to 12 students this year, with further interest from other families and commitment that younger siblings of current students are highly likely to attend upon reaching 8th or 9th grade.
 - Only 4 of these students are scheduled to graduate in the next two years; the others include 1 eighth grader, 5 ninth graders, and 2 tenth graders.
 - This increases our tuition income from \$105,000 in FY22 to \$193,000 for FY23.
- We set ambitious goals in fundraising and grant-seeking for the year, and both have yielded significantly greater results than in previous years. In years leading up to the pandemic, EBS raised less than \$6000 annually in grants, fundraising, and other external funding efforts.
 - In FY22, we quadrupled that amount, bringing in \$7000 in fundraising and \$17,000 in grants.
 - Through December of FY23, we have already brought in \$6000 in fundraising and nearly \$18,000 in grants, both of which put us roughly 70% of the way to our goals for the end of the fiscal year.

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- In addition to these funds, EBS has also secured a forgivable loan for operational expenses through the Vermont Economic Development Authority in the amount of \$82,655.
- Overall, the effect of these developments is to increase EBS's revenue to over 200% of the previous year's income. As of the beginning of September, we were indeed in a vulnerable position financially; by December, we have improved our position significantly, both for the present and the foreseeable future.

Financial Position & Independent School Team Recommendation

AoE Statement: "AOE considers the financial position of East Burke School to be vulnerable and believes a short-term approval to be appropriate to allow for continued review of the school's financial position.... The Agency of Education's Independent School Team recommends a one-year renewal to the Secretary of Education."

EBS Response: This renewal process began in January of 2020. East Burke School has been undergoing this review for the three years since. While we appreciate the necessity and propriety of the state's interest in ensuring our successful operation as an institution serving the educational needs of the students in the Northeast Kingdom, we feel that we are better able to do so without the prospect of perpetually ongoing review as part of our responsibility.

Given the recommendation of a one-year renewal and the probable four-month turnaround on an application for the next renewal, we calculate that by June 2024, EBS will have spent 3.5 out of 4.5 years undergoing review. To us, this seems excessive.

With the only concern noted in the current report being one of financial position, we ask that the State Board and the Secretary of Education take into consideration both the unusual financial strains brought on by the pandemic and the significant improvements made to EBS's financial position within the last several months. In light of these circumstances, we hope they might see fit to grant a longer term of renewal.

If we may be permitted, we would like to dedicate the time and energy that would go toward a further review in a year's time instead toward our mission and primary purpose as a school, which is to serve our students and develop their abilities of critical literacy, creative thinking, and collaborative action.

From: [nathan](#)
To: [Pallas Gray, Pat](#)
Cc: [Megan Durling](#)
Subject: Re: Draft SBE Report & Addendum
Date: Friday, December 30, 2022 3:54:46 PM
Attachments: [Addendum Signed Again.pdf](#)
[SBE Response December '22.docx.pdf](#)
[Addendum.pdf](#)

EXTERNAL SENDER: Do not open attachments or click on links unless you recognize and trust the sender.

Hello Pat,

I hope you are preparing to celebrate a very happy new year this weekend, despite the forecast for unpleasant weather. Attached, please find East Burke School's response to the AoE Draft Report for the State Board of Education, and both our previous signature of the Independent School Addendum and an updated one in case it is necessary to put that in writing anew for this round of reporting and review.

Please let us know if there is anything else we may provide; I see a scheduled date of January 4 for the Independent School Approval Renewal Committee, and if we could know as soon as possible whether that will be when we appear, it would be most helpful in terms of our scheduling. Megan and I may need to trade off appearing before the committee if we are unable to schedule a substitute on that short notice. Thank you, and again, have a safe and happy new year!

Warm regards,
Nathan

Nathan E. Bradshaw

*Co-Head of School
Teacher of Liberal Arts & Sciences*



“Schools can only highly serve us, when they aim not to drill, but to create; when they gather from far every ray of various genius to their hospitable halls, and, by the concentrated fires, set the hearts of their youth on flame.” —Ralph Waldo Emerson

On Mon, Dec 5, 2022 at 11:33 AM Pallas Gray, Pat <Pat.PallasGray@vermont.gov> wrote:

Hello,

If the report you received included a recommendation at the end, then you have the entire report. For some reason, Word is adding pages to some documents. It may be because of the Word version being used by different parties.

You are correct, we cannot adjust the report to the SBE. However, you should provide the information about the VEDA grant in your response to the report.

Please try to send a response at the latest by the end of the month. We need to get this report on the SBE's Independent School Subcommittee ASAP.

Thanks

Pat

From: Nathan Bradshaw <nathan@eastburkeschool.org>
Sent: Monday, December 5, 2022 9:50 AM
To: Pallas Gray, Pat <Pat.PallasGray@vermont.gov>
Cc: Megan Durling <megan@eastburkeschool.org>
Subject: Re: Draft SBE Report & Addendum

EXTERNAL SENDER: Do not open attachments or click on links unless you recognize and trust the sender.

Good morning, Pat,

I'm glad to get this email and to read the report--I notice, however, that we have received only 6 of 9 pages. Could you please send the additional pages so that we may review the report in its entirety?

I do not know if a quick turnaround is going to be possible; we will want our board to read and discuss it first, and their next opportunity to meet will be either next Wednesday or the week after. Megan and I are also quite busy as we head into the final weeks of one semester and prepare both a J-Term and our next semester of classes.

Given that the major remaining concern the AoE has is financial, I ought to share a brief update on that front. We remain at an enrollment of 12, having had one student withdraw and then enrolling another immediately after. We had set ambitious fundraising and grant-writing goals of roughly \$35,000 for the fiscal year in our budget, and we were over 60% of the way in both fundraising and grants going into Thanksgiving Break. During that break, we also received news that we

have been approved for a VEDA forgivable loan of over \$82,000. We are still determining how best to leverage that capital, but we anticipate a surplus at the end of the year of somewhere in the range of \$60,000-\$70,000.

I imagine it is not possible to adjust the AoE review in light of these developments, but I hope this begins to assuage the concerns about finances. Please let us know as soon as you are able about the remaining 3 pages of the report. Thank you!

Warm regards,

Nathan

Nathan E. Bradshaw

Co-Head of School

Teacher of Liberal Arts & Sciences

Image removed by sender.



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On Mon, Dec 5, 2022 at 8:24 AM Pallas Gray, Pat <Pat.PallasGray@vermont.gov> wrote:

Good morning,

The draft State Board of Education renewal report and an addendum document are attached. By State Board rule, you have 30 days to review the attached report for accuracy purpose. If, however, you can review the report and send your response via email very soon, we are in hopes of getting the school's renewal request on the full State Board's upcoming agenda. If this isn't possible, please let me know and we will need to

consider the request for renewal at the Board's meeting in January. Please do not make corrections to the actual draft report, just provide a list via email of any changes needed for accuracy purposes, and please don't forget to return the signed addendum.

The new independent school process requires the draft reports to go to a State Board Subcommittee. At their meeting, they will want to speak to you briefly about the report, your response, and perhaps ask questions regarding your school; therefore, you will need to be available for a short time on the day/time they are meeting. Generally, it takes about 10 minutes or so.

After I receive your response, I will let you know when the State Board Subcommittee is going to meet. The Subcommittee of the State Board will introduce your school to the full Board at the time the full Board can review/consider the independent school renewal request. Again, you will need to be available for approximately 10 minutes to speak to the full Board if they have questions.

You will be notified in advance about how to remotely connect to both the Subcommittee and the full State Board meeting when they are held.

The addendum is a new document now required because of the independent school rules which went into effect on May 10, 2022. These cover the changes that went into effect immediately upon adoption of the new independent school rules.

Looking forward to hearing from you regarding this matter. If you have any questions, please let me know.

Take care

Pat

Pat Pallas Gray

Independent School Consultant

Agency of Education

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