

Site Review

Renewal – East Burke School - Second Site Review

Independent School Review Report General Education

**Site Review Conducted
September 7, 2022**

Submitted by Independent School Review Team:

J. Deborah Ormsbee

Pat Pallas-Gray



Site Review Scope of Work and Purpose

It was decided, by the State Board of Education during their meeting in August, that East Burke School's review and consideration for renewal be postponed until October. The AOE's Independent School team was asked, by the State Board, to conduct a second site review of the East Burke School. The review was completed on September 7, 2022. The second review was scheduled to specifically address program deficiencies identified during the school's required renewal visit on October 26, 2021.

The second review was conducted by Independent School Team members and included a review of each requirement, per Rule Series 2200 and 16 V.S.A, including the State Board Rules that took effect on May 10, 2022.

School Philosophy & Educational Objectives

State Board of Education Rule 2225.2, 2225.5

School Philosophy

East Burke School's philosophy remains essentially the same except for the following addition contained within the revised and updated application submitted after the August 2022 State Board meeting.

"[East Burke School's] approach to education... seeks above all else to nurture a sense of wonder in our students. To do this, we look both to inspiration from the past and to possibilities for the future. We strive to remain true to the heart of education—a word and an ideal rooted in cultivating the youth of a community to full maturity—while seeking out new and pioneering ways to engage and inspire. We blend the timeless with the innovative, understanding the virtues and the limitations of each. In this way, we may honor and benefit from our heritage while we recognize the need and opportunity to grow beyond what has come before."

Program Objectives

"East Burke School offers small class sizes, flexible scheduling, an interdisciplinary approach to learning with yearly themes, time set aside for students to explore their own interests, community service opportunities, self-directed learning, in-depth narrative evaluations (not grades), off-campus learning opportunities, and whole school learning opportunities. We are committed to remaining small... This allows us to truly focus on each student's academic, social, and emotional growth. Our curriculum includes our students' passions, hobbies, and interests. We encourage [students] to identify an area of special interest and make it a part of their high school experience.

East Burke School has emerged from the pandemic as a pioneer of climate and community resilience education. Our renewed mission is to prepare our students to confront 21st-century challenges through critical literacy, creative thinking, and collaborative action.

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 among our students a sense of possibility and a spirit of determination to make the world a better place. Key to our mission is our unique multi-grade approach: students participate in multi-grade classrooms that reflect the

diversity of age and ability in the communities they will soon enter as citizens. By learning to collaborate and assist one another through rigorous studies, our students develop leadership skills that will be essential when they come to take on the challenges facing their communities.”

School Enrollment

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

Independent School representatives confirmed that on the day of visit, there were eleven students enrolled at East Burke School, FY23. These students are primarily from Kingdom East SD, a school choice district. Seven of the eleven enrolled students are new to East Burke School, FY23.

The school provides equivalent number of hours as a public school and students attend four days a week, Monday – Thursday. Community based activities are scheduled on Fridays monthly throughout the school year.

Students are enrolled in East Burke School through a rolling admission process. Under the school’s current enrollment process, a parent/guardian contacts the school by phone, and a plan is made for the student to do a “shadow” day. Parents/guardians and prospective students meet with East Burke School staff at the conclusion of the school visit to discuss potential enrollment.

Final decisions for enrollment are made through a consensus model that includes East Burke’s Co-directors, parents/guardians, and must include the student’s input to enroll. The next step in the enrollment process is for East Burke School’s administrators to reach out the student’s most recent school of attendance to obtain copies of his/her educational records.

Governance

State Board of Education Rule 2225.4

No changes to East Burke School’s governance board have been made since the last site review on October 26, 2021.

Minimum Course of Study & Required Assessments

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

East Burke School’s administration submitted an updated curriculum overview and grade level benchmarks to the Agency of Education, and this is on file. East Burke School continues to develop Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs) to improve documentation of student progress based upon benchmarks tracked by assignment and date of assignment. Independent School Team members have received a sample lesson plan for delivery of instruction in a multigrade classroom that includes learning objectives, alignment with standards, class routine and accommodations. East Burke School is currently developing placement assessments for former homeschooling students who lack adequate grade level documentation.

Additionally, East Burke School has contracted with educational consultant Dr. Harry Chaucer to integrate student PLPs with the school’s educational objectives.

State Assessment Requirements

East Burke School's administration have contacted the agency's state assessment staff to receive technical assistance and have a plan for administering required state assessments to comply with 16 V.S.A. § 166(g).

Professional Staff

State Board of Education Rule 2225.8

East Burke School is staffed with two co-directors that also serve as subject area instructors. These staff members are also responsible for instruction in languages, fine arts, community-based education, and various student electives.

Prior to both the October 27, 2021 and September 7, 2022 site reviews, the Independent School Team confirmed that East Burke School's staff have the required credentials to ensure each instructor meets the minimum qualifications to teach in assigned content areas.

Staffing Safeguards:

Co-directors confirmed that background checks are conducted prior to start date for all newly hired employees. Currently, the school does not engage the services of any outside contractors, volunteers, or part-time staff responsible for academic or support services.

Hazing, Harassment & Bullying Policies

Administrators of the East Burke School have adopted the AOE policy.

Mandatory Reporting Procedures:

There are no changes to East Burke School's mandatory reporting policies and procedures since the October 26, 2021 site review.

Facilities

State Board of Education Rule 2225.6

East Burke School staff have exerted effort in repairing and improving the cleanliness and organization of education materials during the intervening time between October 26, 2021 and September 7, 2022 site reviews. Classroom spaces on the second floor were cleaner, more organized, and welcoming.

One of the former classroom spaces is closed to students as remodeling of this space is underway to ensure student safety and adequate workspace. Remodeling is expected to conclude during the FY24 school year.

The small-class or group instructional areas on both the first and second floor remain in good repair, are well organized, welcoming, and clean. These areas also provide easy access to education supplies and curriculum materials, as needed.

The school's fire alarm system is hard-wired and is inspected annually. The heating system is three years old and is inspected annually.

Emergency Services:

In an emergency, East Burke School staff contact 911 Emergency Services. Each of the school's co-directors have completed first aid and CPR training/certification.

Nursing Services, Medications, and Immunization Records:

East Burke School does not have a school nurse on staff.

School administrators reported that student immunization records are up to date and included in student files located in administrative offices.

Financial Capacity

East Burke School presented multiple documents regarding its financial capacity including an unaudited "Statement of Financial Position" that was certified by Bill Mutschler, Treasurer on behalf of the Board of Directors (no longer with East Burke School). Additionally, East Burke School submitted a line of credit letter from Passumpsic Bank, and funds have been utilized in 2022. The reporting Co-Director of East Burke School confirmed that the line of credit is only used as necessary for daily operations.

The Independent School team reviewed other submitted financial documentation and identified that the financial position of East Burke School is susceptible to small changes in enrollment and increased costs. One of East Burke School's Co-Directors informed the AOE that 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.

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.

Independent School Team Recommendation

East Burke School's co-directors have worked toward addressing deficiencies noted during the first renewal site visit conducted by AOE review staff on October 26, 2021. Co-directors at the school have been in contact with the Independent School Team and received technical assistance to ensure full compliance with State Board of Education Rules.

The Agency of Education's Independent School Team recommends a one-year renewal to the Secretary of Education.