

**State Board of Education
Independent School Approval Review Committee**

Draft Meeting Minutes

Meeting Place: Virtual Teams Meeting/Video/Teleconference

Call in #: 1-802-828-7667, Conference ID: 371 352 241#

1 National Life Drive

Montpelier, VT 05620-2501

Date: September 20, 2022

Present:

State Board of Education (SBE) Subcommittee Members: Tom Lovett – Chair, Patrick Brown, Jenna O’Farrell, Lyle Jepson

Agency of Education (AOE): Patrick Halladay, Maureen Gaidys, Deborah Ormsbee, Patricia Pallas Gray, Cassandra Ryan,

Others: Lexi Shear, Peter Stoklova, Karen Thomson , Coleen Healy, Shireen McNabb

Call to Order/Roll Call/Amendments to the Agenda

Tom Lovett called the meeting to order at 12:03 p.m. There were no amendments to the agenda.

Public to be Heard: No public wished to be heard.

Approve Minutes from August 8, 2022 Meeting

Patrick moved approval of the August 8, 2022, meeting minutes. Tom seconded the motion, which passed unanimously, with Jenna abstaining due to her absence from the meeting.

Update from Mount Snow Academy

Update from Peter Stoklova. They have a conditional approval. They have reviewed residential standards for accreditation, which is a one-to-two-year process. AISNE (Association of Independent Schools in New England) will review the school’s information. They are in the process of becoming a candidate for their accreditation process. They are approved as a ski school and meet the safety and compliance standards for athletes traveling with adults, etc. Mr. Stoklova indicated that it is a rigorous process. They had included 4th and 5th grades in their request. But they do not anticipate any 4th and 5th

graders for school year 2022-23. That being said, they are not asking for a change in their application. Spring 2024 would be the accreditation date for AISNE to vote on their application.

Patrick asked about mental health support. The music teacher has a mental health background. Students have an every-other-week check-in with her. Mr. Stoklova feels that the outdoor adventure-based opportunities that are provided support positive mental health. Workplace safety is addressed by OSHA. Outdoor safety requirements are rigorous, with training and equipment that will safeguard students and staff from injury. They have a small infirmary at the school, if needed. Police and Fire services are across the street from the school in West Dover. They have installed a camera so that they are aware of the presence of visitors. Their emergency action plan has been reviewed.

Outcome of the discussion: Mr. Stoklova will send the timeline and outline of work towards accreditation to Tom. Mr. Stoklova will be invited to a future meeting for an update.

Independent School Approvals:

Red Fox Community School

An update on Red Fox Community School, Manchester Center, VT was provided by Patrick Halladay and Pat Pallas Gray. Red Fox Community School is seeking renewal of general independent school approval to serve students in grades K-5.

It was noted by Pat Pallas Gray that the Red Fox Community School is looking for approval for grades K-5 and that they are now in a new building. Their Board has also grown from five to seven. Karen Thomson spoke on behalf of the school. The school staff was recognized for their hard work.

The Secretary of the Agency of Education recommends that the State Board of Education grants renewal of general independent school approval to Red Fox Community School, Montpelier, VT, to serve students in grades K-4. This approval is for five years, through June 30, 2027. This approval is conditional on the requirement that the school reports to the Agency of Education within five business days whenever any changes occur in enrollment, programs, policies, facilities, financial capacity, staffing or administration during the approval period.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY: Title 16 V.S.A. § 166 (b) State Board Rules 2200

- 1. An independent school may operate and provide elementary and secondary education if it is approved by the State Board of Education.*
- 2. The State Board of Education shall approve an independent school if it substantially complies with the Board's rules for independent schools, promulgated as Series 2200 (Independent School Program Approval).*
- 3. Red Fox Community School is seeking renewal of general independent school approval to serve students in grades K-4.*
- 4. Red Fox Community School was granted initial independent school approval by the State Board on May 16, 2018 through June 30, 2020, to serve students in grades K-4.*
- 5. Four sections of the new independent school rules took effect upon adoption on May 10, 2022. Those rules are Rule 2223 (Procedure), Rule 2224 (Reciprocity), Rule 2226 (Application) and Rule 2227 (Approval). Red Fox Community School has provided a signed addendum attesting to meeting these new rules.*

Motion on program approval for Red Fox Community School

Lyle made a motion to grant renewal of program approval to Red Fox Community School for grades K-5 for a period of five years. The motion was seconded by Patrick Brown and passed unanimously.

Pacem School

An update on Pacem School, Montpelier, VT was provided. Pacem School is seeking renewal of general independent school approval to serve students in grades 6-12.

Agency staff lauded the rigor at the school. Lexi Shear, Head of School, pointed out that they have grown from 12 to 25 full-time students and 10 part-time students, with a waiting list. The school employs nine teachers and one office administrator. Not all are full-time.

Ms. Shear explained that the school provides an advisor for each student. If students have issues, mental health or otherwise, they have regular interaction with adults. The school is working on a plan to have a local therapist who would be available on a part-time basis. They also connect regularly with parents. The school has a thorough plan relating to threats.

The Secretary of the Agency of Education recommends that the State Board of Education grants renewal of general independent school approval to Pacem School, Montpelier, VT, to serve students in grades 6-12. This approval is for five years, through June 30, 2027. This approval is conditional on the requirement that the school reports to the Agency of Education within five business days whenever any changes occur in enrollment, programs, policies, facilities, financial capacity, staffing or administration during the approval period.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY: Title 16 V.S.A. § 166 (b) State Board Rules 2200

- 1. An independent school may operate and provide elementary and secondary education if it is approved by the State Board of Education.*
- 2. The State Board of Education shall approve an independent school if it substantially complies with the Board's rules for independent schools, promulgated as Series 2200 (Independent School Program Approval).*
- 3. Pacem School is seeking renewal of general independent school approval to serve students in grades 6-12.*
- 4. Pacem School was last granted renewal of State Board approval on August 23, 2016, through June 30, 2021, to serve students in grades 6-12.*
- 5. Four sections of the new independent school rules took effect upon adoption on May 10, 2022. Those rules are Rule 2223 (Procedure), Rule 2224 (Reciprocity), Rule 2226 (Application) and Rule 2227 (Approval). Pacem School has provided a signed addendum attesting to meeting these new rules.*

Motion on program approval for Pacem School

Jenna made a motion to grant renewal of program approval for Pacem School for grades 6-12 for a period of five years. The motion was seconded by Patrick Brown and passed unanimously.

Southshire Community School

An update on Southshire Community School, North Bennington, VT was provided. Southshire Community School is seeking renewal of general independent school approval to serve students in grades K-8.

Patrick Halladay outlined the school's request. Pat Pallas Gray described the school as, "A bright vibrant place. A fun place to visit." They recommend a 5-year renewal.

Coleen Healy spoke on behalf of the school. A positive sign is that students, who are now adults, are bringing their children to see "their school." She suggested that this was a sign that graduates want their children to have a "Southshire experience". Parents, in August of 2019, renovated a horse barn into a community meeting space, where plays can be put on for the school community. Community support keeps the school going by way of investment of time and energy from parents.

Tom noted that there is extensive parent involvement. He noted that teachers are well credentialed but not licensed in the State of Vermont and the Board is not exclusively made up of parents. There are Board members from the community.

Ms. Healy explained that the school has always accepted students who have special support needs. They work with local Individual Education Program (IEP) teams and have not experienced the need to move students to another program or school. Currently, they work with insurance companies to fund services in OT/PT and Speech and Language services.

They currently have a waiting list. They have outside counseling available for students and two retired special education teachers who consult with them.

They actively promote safety and respect. Teachers are required to undertake professional development. There is a sense of community and a feeling that people are heard, socially and emotionally.

They have seven members on their Board of Directors. The bylaws allow for 12 members.

The Secretary of the Agency of Education recommends that the State Board of Education grants renewal of general independent school approval to Southshire School, Montpelier, VT, to serve students in grades K-8. This approval is for five years, through June 30, 2027. This approval is conditional on the requirement that the school reports to the Agency of Education within five business days whenever any changes occur in enrollment, programs, policies, facilities, financial capacity, staffing or administration during the approval period.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY: Title 16 V.S.A. § 166 (b) State Board Rules 2200

1. An independent school may operate and provide elementary and secondary education if it is approved by the State Board of Education.
2. The State Board of Education shall approve an independent school if it substantially complies with the Board's rules for independent schools, promulgated as Series 2200 (Independent School Program Approval).
3. Southshire School is seeking renewal of general independent school approval to serve students in grades K-8.
4. Southshire School was last granted renewal of State Board approval on June 20, 2016 through June 30, 2021, to serve students in grades K-8.

5. Four sections of the new independent school rules took effect upon adoption on May 10, 2022. Those rules are Rule 2223 (Procedure), Rule 2224 (Reciprocity), Rule 2226 (Application) and Rule 2227 (Approval). Southshire School has provided a signed addendum attesting to meeting these new rules

Motion on program approval for Southshire Community School

Lyle made a motion to grant renewal of program approval for Southshire Community School for grades K-8 for a period of five years. The motion was seconded by Patrick Brown and passed unanimously.

Green Mountain Montessori

An update on Green Mountain Montessori, Essex Jct., VT was provided. They are seeking renewal of independent kindergarten approval to serve a maximum of 40 students.

Patrick Halladay recommends a two-year renewal, which is the maximum allowed for a kindergarten program. Pat Pallas Gray indicated that the visits to the school are always enjoyable. Children were recently studying the planets and stars. It was a great experience for children and adults alike. Project based learning, literacy and math were examples of advanced instructional units that were observed. It is a vibrant program.

Shireen McNabb spoke on behalf of the school. The school is at capacity. They are serving 40 students.

The Secretary of the Agency of Education recommends that the State Board of Education grants renewal of independent kindergarten approval to Green Mountain Montessori School, Essex Jct., VT. This approval is for two years, through June 30, 2024. This approval is conditional on the requirement that the school reports to the Agency of Education within five business days whenever any changes occur in enrollment, programs, policies, facilities, financial capacity, staffing or administration during the approval period.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY: Title 16 V.S.A. § 166 (b) State Board Rules 2270

- 1. An independent school may operate and provide elementary and secondary education if it is approved by the State Board of Education.*
- 2. The State Board of Education shall approve an independent school if it substantially complies with the Board's rules for independent schools, promulgated as Series 2200 (Independent School Program Approval).*
- 3. Green Mountain Montessori School is seeking renewal of kindergarten approval.*
- 4. Green Mountain Montessori School was granted renewal of kindergarten approval by the State Board on July 18, 2018, through June 30, 2020*

Motion on program approval for Green Mountain Montessori

Patrick made a motion to grant renewal of program approval for Green Mountain Montessori for an independent kindergarten for a period of two years. The motion was seconded by Jenna and passed unanimously.

Mountainside House

An update on Mountainside House, Ludlow, VT was provided. Mountainside House is seeking renewal of tutorial approval to serve a maximum of twelve male and female youth, 13-18 years of age, who need crisis stabilization.

The Agency reviewed the tutorial program only and recommends a renewal for a period of two years. Students take part in a morning of academics with activities in the afternoon. The school far exceeds the 10 hours each week in tutorial services required. The program is licensed by Department for Children and Families (DCF) as a residential program with 24/7 staffing. Hours are tracked and translated into credit towards completion (graduation). Students receive individualized attention, which allows each to move through topics at their own rate and often more quickly than would have taken place in a classroom environment.

Students stay for six months or less. Most students are in DCF custody. Mountainside works closely with the families of the students. The program is generally full. They are licensed for 12 students. Staffing is the determining factor for the number of students they can serve.

The Secretary of the Agency of Education recommends that the State Board of Education grants renewal of tutorial approval to Mountainside House in Ludlow, VT, to serve a maximum of twelve male and female youth, 13-18 years of age, who are in need of crisis stabilization. This approval is for a two-year term through June 30, 2024. This approval is conditional on the requirement that the school reports to the Agency of Education within five business days whenever any changes occur in enrollment, programs, policies, facilities, financial capacity, staffing or administration during the approval period.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY: Title 16 V.S.A. § 828 State Board Rules 2235

- 1. A tutorial program means that education is provided to a pupil placed in a short-term program that is not administered by a school district. The purpose of the program is to provide evaluation and/or treatment and to mitigate learning loss during the duration of a student's stay for assessment and placement in an appropriate program.*
- 2. The average length of stay for students in a tutorial program is generally three to six months and that may be extended, by the Department for Children and Families, for up to nine or more months, depending upon treatment and placement considerations of each child.*
- 3. Mountainside House has the capacity to serve twelve youth. It is the responsibility of the Department for Children and Families' (DCF) Residential Treatment Licensing Office to set the maximum number of youth that can be served. DCF temporarily reduced the capacity at Mountainside House from twelve beds to six beds, due to staffing shortages and pandemic pressures. It is expected that the number of youth to be served will be adjusted by DCF as additional staff is employed.*
- 4. Mountainside House is seeking renewal of its tutorial approval. 5. Mountainside House was last granted tutorial approval by the State Board on July 18, 2018, through June 30, 2020.*

Motion on program approval (tutorial only) for Mountainside House

Lyle made a motion to grant renewal of program approval for Mountainside House, for a period of two years for the tutorial program serving a maximum of twelve male and female youth, 13-18 years of age, who need crisis stabilization. The motion was seconded by Jenna and passed unanimously.

Committee Work Schedule:

Tom suggested that in October East Burke School and Mount Snow Academy will be on the agenda. Pat Pallas Gray suggested that there may be a follow up from Lake Champlain Waldorf School, a high school and two school closures for the committee to acknowledge.

Regarding follow-ups, BRIGHTality has provided professional development assurances and they have a certificate of occupancy. They have fulfilled the requests of the committee.

There will be a meeting on or about October 12th with an abbreviated agenda.

There is a back log of schools in process. Site visits are underway. The special education team is understaffed.

Tom asked for an updated spreadsheet after each committee meeting where action has taken place.

Public to be Heard: No public wished to be heard.

Adjourn:

Lyle moved to adjourn the meeting at 1:25 p.m. Patrick seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Minutes prepared by Lyle Jepson

