

## 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: 794 189 100#

Date: March 9, 2023

### Present

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

**Agency of Education (AOE):** Pat Pallas Gray, J. Deborah Ormsbee, Suzanne Sprague, Josh Souliere

**Others:** Kelly Bushey and staff from Connected Circles LLC.

### Call to Order/Roll Call/Amendments to the Agenda

Tom Lovett called the meeting to order at 11:02am.

### Approve Draft Meeting Minutes from [February 1, 2023 Meeting](#)

Tom Lovett made a motion to approve the minutes from the February 1, 2023 meeting. Jenna O'Farrell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

### Public to be Heard

Ben Newman, a clinician, gave his full support for the on-site educational option for Connected Circles as soon as possible. He fully supports Connected Circles. Tom recommended that written comment be forwarded. Mr. Newman indicated that he has already done so.

### Update on Backlog

There are many visits scheduled for this month. Seven schools continue to need to receive and then submit their New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) reports. Staff indicated that there will be at least one school ready for the April meeting, the Bridge School. It was visited on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Five schools continue to be vetted, with staff needing to send reports to those schools and responses to be received back from each.

Moving forward, there will be schools ready for each meeting over the coming months.

### Independent School Approvals

[Connected Circles, LLC](#)

Connected Circles LLC is requesting an initial independent school approval for general and regular education instruction. Staff discussed their review and initial visit. Two items prevented initial approval as outlined below. Subsequent to the review, revised information has been presented to Agency staff. It was noted that Connected Circles has a system in place for professional development and supervision & evaluation of staff.

Identified Program Deficiency: Facilities State Board of Education Rule 2225.6.

At the time of review, Connected Circles' facility did not meet accessibility requirements, in particular, the school's bathroom facilities. During the initial site visit it was also unclear if the school's main entrance and entrances for each class space, common spaces and lunchroom areas were accessible. During the exit interview with Connected Circles' owner, Agency review team members provided technical assistance regarding expectations of the State Board of Education in meeting accessibility requirements.

Post-Site Review Interventions: The owner of Connected Circles submitted, on January 30, 2023, to the Agency's Independent School Team a copy of an updated Certificate of Occupancy and supporting documents to confirm completion of renovations to the business facilities and demonstrated compliance with physical accessibility requirements regarding main entrance, bathroom facilities, access/egress of the first-floor classrooms, lunchroom and common spaces.

Agency of Education Response & Update: As a result, the Agency of Education's Independent School Team can confirm that the owner of Connected Circles has met State Board of Education facilities requirements under SBE Rule 2225.6.

Identified Program Deficiencies: Minimum Course of Study 2225.5, Title 16 §906 & Professional staff requirements 2226.8.1.

At the time of review, Connected Circles did not have a qualified social studies teacher and therefore could not meet the Minimum Course of Study requirements for this core subject area.

Post-Site Review Interventions: The owner of Connected Circles submitted, on February 15, 2023, to the Agency's Independent School Team information about the qualified social studies teacher that was hired. This teacher is scheduled to start on March 9, 2023.

Agency of Education Response & Update: As a result, the Agency of Education's Independent School Team can confirm that the owner of Connected Circles has met State Board of Education Minimum Course of Study and professional staff requirements under SBE Rule 2225.5. and 2226.8.1.

Recommendation: The Agency's review team recommends initial independent school approval to the Secretary of Education at this time for Connected Circles due to identified deficiencies in the programming being remediated.

Jenna O'Farrell requested information on student numbers and transition plans expected with the return to on-site operation at Connected Circles LLC. Currently six students are being served off-site in the community. The plan is to return students to campus as soon as they are allowed to do so following approval at the upcoming State Board of Education meeting, March

15<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Tom Lovett indicated that once State Board of Education approval is received, students may immediately begin.

Connected Circles LLC maximum enrollment will be 12 and they anticipate that they will immediately have a wait list. Regarding staffing, there are four teachers, three connectors, a clinical coordinator, and the Director (Kelly Bushey). Additional connectors will be needed in the near future.

Agency staff indicated that there is a signed attestation, a copy of which will be sent to Tom Lovett.

The Connected Circles LLC Board of Directors will meet on March 16<sup>th</sup>, following the State Board meeting. There are currently three Board members. They are looking for more Board members.

There is a personal guarantee from Kelly Bushey on a line of credit received by Connected Circles LLC. The operating budget is currently \$1,700,000, assuming full enrollment and full staffing in place.

Tom Lovett congratulated Connected Circles LLC for student advocacy on behalf of their students. Tom Lovett also thanked the Agency Staff for the interactive process used in responding to and submitting additional information to allow the school to be approved, including a report that highlighted commendations for the school, with very clear recommendations.

Jenna O'Farrell thanked the Connected Circles LLC staff for the time, passion and attention to detail that they have provided on behalf of the students. Patrick Brown commended the staff and Kelly Bushey's depth of commitment, including her personal and financial commitment.

A motion was made by Lyle Jepson and seconded by Patrick Brown to recommend to the full State Board of Education initial independent school approval for both general and special education instruction for Connected Circles LLC for a period of two years ending June 30, 2025. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Committee Work Schedule**

There will be April, May and June meetings. Dates and times for the coming months were discussed.

### **Public to be Heard**

No additional public wished to be heard.

### **Adjourn**

Patrick Brown moved to adjourn the meeting. Jenna O'Farrell seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 11:38 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Lyle Jepson

