

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: 652 097 14#

Date: November 6, 2024

Present

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

Agency of Education (AOE): Maureen Gaidys, Deborah Ormsbee, Josh Souliere, Jaime Kraybill

Others: Dan Rufo, Clayton Petry (NCPSA), Mark Bugbee, Lileth Coke, Ken Fredette, Dan Rufo, Liz O, Clare Wool, H. Stephen Bralley, Martine Gulick, Liz Oberreiter, Marlene Alvarez, Larry Blackmer, Sue Ceglowski, 802-275-8666, 802-318-7353, 802-324-7145, rh, 802-522-8138.

Call to Order/Roll Call/Amendments to the Agenda

Tom Lovett called the meeting to order at 3:31 p.m. There were no amendments to the agenda.

Approval of [Minutes from the October 3, 2024 Meeting](#)

Tom Lovett made a motion to approve the minutes from October 3, 2024, meeting. Lyle Jepson seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Public to be Heard

Ken Fredette, member of the Steering Committee for Friends for Public Education, objected to the proceeding taking place. Specifically, he objected to providing public funding to private religious schools, which he claims are discriminatory. Click [here for Ken Fredette's public comment](#).

Clare Wool, Chair of the Burlington School Board, pointed out that she is concerned about understanding why the Committee intended to go into executive session without a notation on the agenda as to the purpose. She also concurred with the concern shared by Ken Fredette. Tom Lovett explained that the purpose for the executive session was to hear a legal opinion regarding Rule 2227.

Senator Martine Gulick asked if the process is the same as what is used for reviewing other accrediting agencies. Tom Lovett indicated that it is the same process.

Overview

The current agencies were grandfathered until December 1st. If requests to be recognized as an accreditor of Independent Schools in Vermont is recommended by the Committee, the full State Board of Education will need to approve or disapprove. The accrediting agencies serve as providers of an independent report to the AOE and State Board of Education. It abbreviates the process for the AOE, which does not then need to visit or provide its own report.

Tom Lovett explained the three types of Independent School Approvals and the rules that need to be followed by each.

1. Recognized Schools
2. Approved Schools but not receiving tuition
3. Approved Schools receiving public funding (includes serving students with special needs and service agreements with local education agency)

All approved schools need to sign an attestation in order to receive public payments, including areas of health, safety and non-discrimination.

Executive Session

Tom Lovett moved that pursuant to 1 V.S.A. §313(a)(1) that the Board finds that premature general public knowledge of confidential attorney-client communications made for the purpose of providing professional legal services to the State Board of Education regarding application of the Board's Rule 2227 would clearly place the Board at a substantial disadvantage. Lyle Jepson seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Tom Lovett further moved that the Board enter executive session to receive confidential attorney-client communications made for the purpose of providing professional legal services to the Board regarding application of the Board's Rule 2227 pursuant to 1 V.S.A. §313(a)(1)(F). The motion was seconded by Lyle Jepson and passed unanimously.

The committee entered executive session at 3:45pm.

The committee exited executive session at 4:03pm.

Review of Applications for Approval as an Accreditor of Independent Schools of Vermont

Department of Education, Northern New England Conference of Seventh Day Adventists

H. Stephen Bralley, and Lileth Coke

There is one school in Vermont that they serve. Their organization has been operating since 1858. Currently, they accredit 850 schools in all 50 states and a handful of countries. The schools serve 1.5 million students. Mr. Bralley indicated that they were not there to advocate for state funding, but they did wish to have the Committee act on their request to continue as an accrediting agency.

Topics discussed included: the three-day visit process, training of schools, school boards and teachers, review of applicant school financial viability, hiring policies, student enrollment policies, and crosswalks between and alignment with Adventist education standards and Vermont State standards. Standards they follow are aligned with nationally recognized

academic standards. Their goal is to only accredit Adventist Educational institutions. Indicators for fostering diversity were discussed. They are not looking to gain tuition payments from public funding. Discussion also included their work to foster diversity, ethnic and racial diversity and programming related to equal access. They monitor for students who have been left out of student programs or academics. Student, parent, staff and community interviews are used as evidence of inclusivity. Schools can access special education funding without pulling down tuition funding. Generally, the LEA provides for the personnel.

Regarding school policies, they monitor personnel policies and specifically require background checks and document licensure/certification. Hiring practices are dictated by codes from the conference. Child and student protection and wellbeing are monitored, and abuse reporting processes are reviewed. They look for hazing, harassment and bullying policies. Student services are reviewed and are embedded in the standards. They do accredit residential schools, the standards for which are embedded in the school environment category.

Rule 2200 has undergone revisions, which they are currently reviewing. They asked how updates are made available to the accrediting agencies. They are interested in knowing how to get information on changes and asked who to communicate with at the Agency of Education.

Western Association of Schools and Colleges

Liz Oberreiter

The organization has had over 60 years of service and currently works with 5,600 schools globally. Most of the schools they serve are in the United States, primarily in the west. They are in 38 states. They are proud of their personalized approach to accreditation. They always look for continuous improvement. They use 14,000 different volunteer peer reviewers. Reviews do not utilize a single template. They generally utilize the school's action plan or strategic plan as the guiding documentation. They support them on their individual plan. They do not evaluate the plan but support growth. Visiting team members are drawn from similar size schools. Member schools must provide volunteers to do visits. They review for standards, which incorporate a state's particular differences. Ms. Oberreiter indicated that it is her job to reach out to review updated state standards. She is currently looking at the Rule 2200 revisions and doing a crosswalk.

They are on a six-year cycle process. There is a three-year report, if deemed necessary. For Vermont schools, they would go with the state required five-year cycle.

Regarding Act 1 curriculum requirements, they look for key indicators that show inclusivity and equal access to all programs for all students. They have experience with an Ethnic Studies curriculum in California. Special education services are generally provided in the schools with LEA staff. Relating to finance, they ask for audits and review budgets. They look for funding streams and request financial aid vetting processes.

Middle States Association of College and Schools (MSA)

Dan Rufo

They are a national and an international organization, with 3,100 total schools, of which 240 are international. They accredit post-secondary schools as well.

They use a pre-candidacy process, which puts the school into a 12–18-month self-study. They review student performance using standardized assessment. Schools rate themselves according to standards and indicators required by MSA. A visiting team enters after the self-study is developed. The self-study leads to self-improvement strategies with associated goals. Together, they develop a multiyear plan for seven years. This will be adapted to Vermont’s five-year requirement. There is a mid-term report at year 3.5.

Three to five members conduct a visit. Professional peer reviewers come from other schools. They mostly pull from accredited schools and a limited number of individuals who are in a school that is going through the process. The team creates a team report, including recommendations that have three levels, including correcting action, and an additional three levels of vetting within MSA. They hold a commission meeting as a final level of vetting, the Commissioners approval. Commission meetings happen twice a year.

They do accredit schools that are residential. Boarding and home-stay programs would include those standards in their self-study.

Regarding finance, they look for two years of evidence. Teams visiting look at one year of evidence.

Within the application they specifically outlined their response to the Rule series 2200 changes.

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The committee entered executive session at 5:14 pm.

The committee exited executive session at 5:54pm.

Tom Lovett recognized the amount of work and limited timeframe provided to each organization to develop and submit an application to the Committee.

Motion to Approve: Tom Lovett moved that the committee propose to the full State Board of Education that the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools be recognized as an Accreditor of Independent Schools in Vermont. Jenna O’Farrell seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Motion to Table: Recognizing the limited amount of time that organizations had to prepare their applications, Tom Lovett made a motion to table action on the Adventist Accreditation Association and Western Association of Schools and Colleges until November 19th to allow

them time to provide evidence of familiarity with an understanding of the requirements of criteria found in Section 2227 a10. Jenna O'Farrell seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Public to Be Heard

There was no public to be heard.

Adjourn

Jenna O'Farrell moved to adjourn the meeting. Tom Lovett seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 6:01p.m.

Minutes prepared by Lyle Jepson

