

Site Review – Renewal & Amendment Request

Independent School Review Report

Kindle Farms

General Education & Special Education

Site Review Conducted – April 8, 2022

Submitted by Independent School Review Teams:

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Site Review Scope of Work and Purpose

Kindle Farm School submitted a timely renewal application and required supporting documentation in compliance with State Board Rule 2227. In addition to renewal, Kindle Farm School's Board and head of school are seeking approval to add speech and language impairment (SLI) as a disability category.

General Education

School Philosophy & Educational Objectives

State Board of Education Rule 2225.2, 2225.5

The Independent School and Special Education teams met with Kindle Farm School staff on Friday April 8, 2022. Interviews were conducted at the two school sites in Newfane, Vermont. Kindle Farm School personnel present for interviews were the education program director, general education classroom teachers, curriculum director, the licensed special educator, a behavior specialist, the school's licensed social worker and a member of the school's governance board. Class observations for English, math, science, and history were conducted at the main school building located at 708, VT Route 30, in Newfane.

The addition of speech and language impairment (SLI) will not change Kindle Farm School's philosophy or stated educational objectives; however, the addition of SLI will serve to expand academic and support objectives based upon identified need and requests from placing, Local Education Associations (LEAs).

School Philosophy

Kindle Farm School's renewal application states that:

"Kindle Farm School is ... approved by the state of Vermont to serve [male] students with a variety of emotional, behavioral, neurological, and learning needs... The children entering Kindle Farm School are individuals who have experienced trauma or disruption in their lives that significantly impairs their participation in the public school system." Enrolled students often have a mix of academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs. The program at Kindle Farm School combines academic, therapeutic recreational activities and traditional therapy to meet student needs.

Program Objectives

Independent School and Special Education teams confirmed Kindle Farm School's educational objectives include a variety of research-based, best practices such as differentiated instruction, project-based learning, Common Core curriculum, and utilization of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support. Imbedded in all areas of Kindle Farm School's academic programs, are trauma informed, social emotional practices, and behavioral interventions to provide additional supports to close student achievement gaps.

The addition of speech language impairment disability category would create opportunities to provide students with much needed interventions. Central to Kindle Farm School's educational

objectives are the methods that integrate restorative practices throughout the program. The school's renewal application states that:

"It is our belief that through a combination of diverse activities tapping multiple intelligences, academic support, [restorative practices], strong supervision and guidance, our students can discard old patterns and discover new ways to communicate, problem solve and learn more effectively."

School Enrollment

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

Agency review of intake documentation in conjunction with staff interviews, confirmed that student enrollment is completed in compliance with SBE Rules and 16 V.S.A and follows a traditional school calendar. Students may attend the extended-year program offered if required, and as determined by the student's Individualized Education Plan team from the enrolling LEA. Kindle Farm School's students are primarily enrolled, by sending LEAs, and State placement through the Department of Children and Families; however, some students are enrolled upon parent request.

Kindle Farm School's current milieu-based student program is currently approved to serve twenty-two students ages eight to twenty-one. However, classes are organized by traditional grades. The one-on-one program is approved to serve twenty students in grades seven through twelve.

Kindle Farm School's student files and information utilizes a system for securing enrollment documentation and ensures confidentiality of referred student and family information, both digitally and in paper form.

All of Kindle Farm School's programs have developed a model for establishing and maintaining appropriate staffing levels to respond to fluctuations in student census for both programs.

Governance

State Board of Education Rule 2225.4

Kindle Farm School is a 501(3)(c) designated non-profit school and since 2010 has operated under the auspices of Health Care & Rehabilitative Services (HCRS) whose home office is in Brattleboro, Vermont. Due to its association with a designated clinical agency, Kindle Farm School has the opportunity to fully integrate a wide-range of therapeutic services in all academic, social, and community-based learning opportunities.

Furthermore, Kindle Farm School has developed and implemented several internal governing processes to support the academic program as well as ensure students access required clinical services. Kindle Farm School's internal governance is comprised of several teams that include leadership, administrative (gen ed and special education), academic, food security and a wellness committee. Each team reports to the head of Kindle Farm School who works collaboratively with HCRS director to ensure on-going, effective integration between clinical services and the school's robust academic curriculum.

Minimum Course of Study & Required Assessments

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

Kindle Farm School provides a high-quality proficiency-based curriculum in all core, elective and life skill program areas. Documentation provided during site review describes curriculum development, lessons, and assessments as:

“...offering occupational curricula that give our students the opportunity to become well-rounded members of the workforce. In compliance with the State of Vermont, we ground our scope and sequence in the Next Generation Science Standards, the College, Career and Civic Life (C3) Framework, Vermont Career and Technical Standards (Diversified Agriculture and Forestry, Nation Resources) and Common Core State Standards.”

Kindle Farm School integrates project-based curriculum across all subject areas to emphasize “local agency and engagement to... model tasks after the true work of real-world readers, writers, listeners, speakers, thinkers, mathematicians, scientists, social scientists and problem-solvers combine to give the curriculum a longevity that is not defined by current standards.”

Independent School and Special Education review teams observed science, math, and social studies classes. Additionally, all review team members were invited to attend a whole-school community circle meeting, comprised of all grade level students, instructional staff, and administration. Students and staff outlined their day, engaged in problem-solving discussions, highlighted community member achievements and reviewed expectations.

Instructional and support staff employ a variety of methods for delivery of educational services that includes access to a traditional classroom environment, individualized student or one-on-one direct instruction, and community-based education programming, as needed. Interviewed staff members indicated that current program practices utilize community partners to enrich and support life, job and social skills curriculum and assessments.

There is a plan in place for providing access to state assessments for students enrolled in all Kindle Farm School’s programs. State assessment testing is accommodated to respond to student specific accommodations, per IEP or 504 Plan requirements.

Independent School and Special Education Team members confirmed that curriculum for all classes, including community-based learning and technology/employment programs, meets State Board of Education requirements for Minimum Course of Study, by grade and student achievement level.

Professional Staff

State Board of Education Rule 2225.8

All of Kindle Farm School’s instructional staff meet State Board qualifications for their positions. Special education teachers hold a Vermont license, and the program has enough

licensed special educators on staff to provide direct services and staff supervision at both the milieu-based, one-to-one program and during community-based academic program activities.

All members of Kindle Farm School's staff engage in annual professional development for therapeutic crisis intervention training, evidence-based behavioral interventions, special education, and content area development.

The new education program director prioritizes professional development opportunities during in-service days, by inviting outside professionals onto campus and ensures staff have ample opportunities to enroll in professional development workshops, college courses or engage in on-line learning. In addition to supporting content area professional development opportunities, Kindle Farm School's administrators provide whole staff training on relevant subjects including, but not limited to special education, trauma informed classroom management techniques, evidence-based behavioral interventions, core curriculum development, authentic assessments, and development of proficiency-based graduation requirements.

Staff curriculum vitae and professional development records are up-to-date and readily available for review in the main administrative building. All staff files contain copies of annual evaluations which incorporate goal setting, identify areas in need of improvement, list of staff strengths and professional achievements.

Staff engage in meetings with mandatory attendance by classroom teachers, special education teachers, clinicians, and other relevant personnel. Student progress is reviewed as well as academic assessments, behavioral and treatment programming

Each member of the staff interviewed, were able to articulate effective processes for adapting curriculum to meet individualized student IEP goals and social/emotional/behavioral objectives. Effective methods for providing direct instruction in traditional class setting, small groups or as part of intensive one-on-one programming is leveraged daily and aligned with student IEPs, 504 Plans and treatment plans. Kindle Farm School's administration works closely with the Department of Children and Families to ensure treatment goals for each student is actualized.

Staffing Safeguards:

Background checks are conducted prior to start date for all newly hired employees. Fingerprint supported criminal records check and Vermont adult/child registries are checked annually. Both reports are contained in a confidential filing system available for review upon request.

All staff receive professional development that ensures proper management of student educational spaces and staff offices. School staff do not restrain or implement seclusion practices, rather utilize onsite clinical staff to provide age and grade level appropriate de-escalation techniques. Staff receive crisis intervention professional development annually during start of the year staff in-service.

Mandatory Reporting Procedures:

Kindle Farm School has implemented and published mandatory reporting procedures and expectations in the staff handbook. Included in the policy are provisions for reporting child abuse and the circumstances in which a case must be reported to school administrators and

appropriate authorities. Staff participate in required annual refreshers and policy requirements for mandatory reporting during in-service training offered every August prior to the start of each school year.

Facilities

State Board of Education Rule 2225.6

Kindle Farm Center is the facility located in Newfane. The facility has two self-contained classrooms to serve students in two grade blocks- 3-4 & 5-7. The second floor of the facility houses the administrative offices for Kindle Farm School. The property is approximately one acre and provides a sports field, basketball court, and some forested trails for recreational opportunities.

Kindle Farm School's second campus, which is known as the Onyon Farm Campus, has 99 acres. There is a renovated farmhouse and a number of other outbuildings. At the second campus there is one multiage classroom, one middle school classroom and three high school classrooms.

All of Kindle Farm School's current program locations, are well organized, clean, welcoming and display student work throughout the facility. Much attention has been given to school buildings to create a calm, welcoming and supportive environment for students and staff.

There is sufficient space to maintain academic, behavioral, mental health treatment programming, and all of Kindle Farm School's program sites meets facility requirements and have provided the Agency of Education with Certificates of Occupancy.

Health & Safety

Each month all occupants, at each of Kindle Farm School locations, practice fire and emergency safety evacuation protocols.

All staff members are trained or participate in annual refreshers for CPR and First Aid with specific emphasis on immediate response to student crisis and injury, as well as regular medical interventions. Protocols are in place for ensuring compliance with blood-borne pathogen and disposal of sharps.

Parents, guardians, or custodial adults are informed of health, medical and program safety protocols, procedures and annually provided with a copy of all program policies at the time of student enrollment.

Nursing Services, Medications and Immunization Records:

The Kindle Farm School does not have access to licensed nursing staff. However, designated staff members are trained in proper dispensing of student medications, maintaining a medication administration record and for keeping the medication in a locked cabinet. Student immunization records are contained in a secure, confidential locked filing system as well as a secure digital site and all files are up to date.

Hazing, Harassment & Bullying Policies

Kindle Farm School has adopted the Agency of Education's hazing, harassment, and bullying policy, and it is published in the faculty and parent/family handbooks. Staff are updated on the policy during annual in-service training.

Financial Capacity

Kindle Farm School submitted audit information, indicating the school has met SBE rule 2226.11 requirements, and has the financial capacity to conduct its educational purposes for the period of approval

Special Education

Based on the rules for Special Education Approval for Independent Schools, the special education team finds that Kindle Farm School has met minimum criteria for the renewal of their approved status.

Kindle Farm School was visited by representatives from the AOE on April 8, 2022. During the visit, special education review team member interviewed school staff, toured the facilities, and observed Kindle Farm School staff/student interactions in and outside of classroom settings. Subsequently, the special education team reviewed student files and IEPs. Comprehensive file reviews were conducted based on the number of sending LEAs, and the disability categories requested for approval. There were no areas of concern highlighted during the site review, and Kindle Farm produced satisfactory evidence, within the file review process, that the school can meet the needs of the students it currently serves.

The following rules were reviewed for compliance:

2228.1 – Related to the categories of disability that the school can support through its provided services: Kindle Farm School demonstrated that it has policies, procedures, and staff training to appropriately support students in the disability categories of; specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, developmental delay, autism spectrum disorders, other health impaired, emotional disturbance, intellectual disability, and multiple disabilities.

2228.3 – Related to the maintenance and implementation of written policies and procedures in Rule-defined areas: Kindle Farm School has demonstrated that it is satisfactorily maintaining and implementing written policies and/or procedures in the areas of: (1) admissions, (2) least restrictive environment, (3) discipline, (4) graduation, (5) faculty qualifications, and (6) faculty-student ratios, as required by SBE Rule.

2228.3.1 – Related to appropriate coordination with sending responsible agencies, parents, public agencies, and other service providers: Kindle Farm has demonstrated evidence of (1) minimum maintenance of educational records, and coordination with LEA and parents through data and file review, (2) participation in evaluation and IEP procedures through IEP review, (3) implementation of IEPs through progress reporting and behavioral data, (4) providing prior notice to the sending LEA regarding the need for a change in a child's program or placement.

2228.3.2 – Regarding appropriate licensure for personnel who are responsible for the provision or supervision of special education and related services: Kindle Farm School has demonstrated

that their Special education teachers, speech-language pathologists, and occupational therapists were licensed by appropriate local state agencies.

2228.4 – Regarding required written agreements: Kindle Farm School has demonstrated that their policies, procedures, and written agreements outline tuition and establish division of legal and fiscal responsibilities with regards to students on IEPs. The Agency recommends that the agreement also clarify what services are included in tuition, and what additional services (if any) are required to meet student needs.

Special Education Team recommended technical assistance: The Agency did uncover evidence of several students with significant absentee issues. The independent school will work with the sending LEA to develop a plan to improve student attendance, and to determine whether compensatory services are required to make up for missed services. The Agency will follow up with both Kindle Farm School and the sending LEA to determine whether or not those actions have been taken.

Approval Recommendation

The Agency of Education’s Independent School team confirms that Kindle Farm School meets statutory requirements and State Board of Education Rules and recommends a five-year renewal of the program as well as approving the addition of special education disability category of speech and language impairment (SLI).