

Site Review

Renewal- Kurn Hattin

Independent School- Renewal General Education

Site Review Conducted - October 18, 2022

Submitted by Independent School Review Team:
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Site Review Scope of Work and Purpose

Kurn Hattin School, founded in 1894 for families experiencing a period of need or instability, is “a year-round, charitable, residential and day program school serving children, ages 5-15, from throughout the Northeast.” Kurn Hattin School is located in Westminster Vermont and follows a year-round school calendar. The Agency of Education’s Independent School Team conducted a general education site review on Thursday, October 18, 2022.

It is important to note that the Agency of Education’s report is only applicable to Kurn Hattin School’s academic program.

General Education

State Board of Education Rule 2226.2

Members of the Agency’s Independent School Team observed classes and met with Kurn Hattin School staff at the school’s campus. Kurn Hattin School staff present for interviews were the head of school, elementary education, and middle school instructors, academic program director and Kurn Hattin Homes’ Assistant Executive Director.

School Philosophy

Kurn Hattin School’s philosophy is centered around ensuring students have access to a stable, consistent, and nurturing academic environment. Many of Kurn Hattin School’s students have experienced varying degrees of adverse childhood experiences and the school’s Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) programming fosters an academic setting that nurtures students individually and provides stability. Kurn Hattin School’s renewal application states that:

“[The] **Mission** of New England Kurn Hattin Homes for Children is:
Kurn Hattin Homes transforms the lives of children and their families forever.”

Our **Core Values** are:

Hope, Perseverance, Sense of Worth, Compassion, Nurturance.

Our PBIS Action Statements are:

We are Kind, We are Proud, and We Keep Trying.

Our **Vision** is:

Given the uncertainty and lack of stability for so many children in the Northeast, Kurn Hattin seeks to provide children in need unparalleled wrap-around services and care to meet the social, physical, intellectual, cultural, emotional, and spiritual needs of children who attend. Kurn Hattin strives to be a place of healing, hope, and home – offering our children an alternative life trajectory toward personal fulfillment, success, and wholeness.”

Program Objectives

Kurn Hattin School's curriculum is developed and implemented utilizing a "whole child" approach to address student social emotional needs and ensure student access to academic programming. Kurn Hattin School's renewal application describes the school objectives as "...providing a rich, child centered, and rigorous educational program for students with complicated family and socio-economic backgrounds. [Kurn Hattin School] believes that this "whole child" approach can be the foundation for a fulfilling and self-actualized life. To accomplish this goal the school utilizes an integrated academic program based on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)... with many opportunities for enrichment and support."

School Enrollment

16 V.S.A. §166(b)(4), State Board of Education Rule 2226.3

On the day of the site review, thirty-two students were enrolled at Kurn Hattin School. Students are enrolled, through a rolling admission process, in one of two ways, parental placement or through the Department of Children and Families.

If a child is parentally placed, parents/guardians contact Kurn Hattin School's main office, request an application packet, and schedule a time to meet with the head of school, and other appropriate school staff members. An extensive admissions process is in place, including a review of student medical files, academic records, student behavioral records and if appropriate mental health records.

The school's student/family handbook and website include information about Kurn Hattin School's admission procedures, including the school's non-discrimination enrollment policies.

Governance

State Board of Education Rule 2226.4

Kurn Hattin School's governance structure is comprised of several administrative teams assigned specific responsibilities for either the residential or academic portions of the program/school. Kurn Hattin School's renewal application included a detailed outline of the school's governance structure by program area.

Administration:

Kurn Hattin School's daily operations are led by a team consisting of the executive director and the assistant executive director, who are responsible for the direction of all administrative and staff functions including: academics, admissions and family outreach, counseling, development and institutional advancement, facilities and grounds, farm and fleet, finance, health services, human resources, public relations, residential services, and technology. The executive director is ultimately responsible for all personnel decisions including hiring, staff discipline, and termination of employment.

Governance:

A volunteer, elected Board of Trustees and Incorporators, including an executive committee, provide direction, guidance, and oversight to the executive director within defined roles and

functions. There are up to 18 members of the Board of Trustees augmented with around 35 Incorporators comprised of diverse expertise and geographical representation. While the executive director provides support, direction, and guidance to the Board of Trustees, the executive director is the Board's sole employee and answers to the Board.

The executive committee is responsible for developing job performance criteria for the executive director and evaluating his/her performance annually. Additionally, the executive "committee provides oversight, direction, and support to the committees and task forces endorsed by the Board of Trustees." Task Forces are created to implement the various functions required by the institution and the strategic plan. Task Force membership is comprised of Trustees, Incorporators, Kurn Hattin staff, selected subject matter experts, and alumni.

Student Body:

"Kurn Hattin serves children (Grades K-8) who are affected by tragedy, social or economic hardship, or disruption in family life." (Source: Kurn Hattin Homes- Renewal Application, January 28, 2022)

Minimum Course of Study

16 V.S.A. §166(b), State Board of Education Rule 2226.5

Kurn Hattin School's instruction is academically appropriate for each grade, K – 8. The curriculum is differentiated to meet the needs of students requiring additional supports in core areas as well as providing academic enrichment for students in need of additional learning opportunities. Students are grouped by academic ability to enable instructional staff to be more responsive to student needs and to encourage peer mentoring and collaboration. Class sizes are intentionally small in order to keep student to teacher ratios that will allow flexible teaching strategies: whole class direct instruction, 1:1 individualized instruction and small cohort skills student groups. During classroom observations, the Agency's Independent School Team confirmed that instruction methods supported the school's stated philosophy and academic objectives.

Kurn Hattin School is in its fifth year as a Positive Behavioral Intervention Support (PBIS) school. The head of school described the school community's behavioral program in the renewal application. "PBIS... supports community, [student] conduct, and a positive learning environment for all. Central to this successful implementation has been significant training (VT PBIS), the use of a database system (SWIS), faculty led PBIS committee, and the integration of robust Restorative Practices (Greater Falls Community Justice Center) to increase community and repair harm/relationships. This implementation of PBIS and Restorative practices has had a very positive effect on the overall availability for learning of Kurn Hattin students, their feelings of belonging, and the use of pro social skills. Significant additional information on Kurn Hattin's use of PBIS and Restorative Practices is available on request." (Source: Kurn Hattin Homes- Renewal Application, January 28, 2022)

Project-based learning initiatives were implemented across all grades at the start of the 2022-2023 school year. Teachers work collaboratively to ensure that curriculum objectives are grade and ability level appropriate. A new SMART Lab was developed and available at the start of

2022-2023 school year, providing access to a STEM curriculum and expanded learning opportunities not previously available to students at Kurn Hattin School.

In addition to core classes, students have access to classes in physical education, languages, fine arts, music, and a variety of electives. All students participate in Kurn Hattin School's award-winning music program. Extra-curricular activities, such as a competitive sports program and a local service-learning program provides students with a well-rounded school experience.

Professional Staff

State Board of Education Rule 2226.8.1

Kurn Hattin School's instructional staff are qualified to teach in their area of instruction. Some teachers either hold a Vermont educator's license or are working toward completing licensure requirements. Many instructors have earned advanced degrees. The academic program director has a background in special education and works with teachers to ensure accommodations are an integral part of each lesson plan.

Teachers take an active role in developing the school's curriculum and ensure learning opportunities include appropriate transitions between grades. Formal classroom observations and review of lesson plans are conducted regularly by the head of school and the academic program director. Additionally, the local LEA provides two Title I teachers, one part-time and one full-time.

The academic program director meets regularly with each teacher to discuss classroom management issues, student needs, discuss problem solving strategies and to establish a thoughtful professional development plan. During interviews with Kurn Hattin School's head of school it was revealed that staff meet weekly to address each student's personal, behavioral, and academic needs and to identify intervention strategies unique to each student.

Faculty engage regularly in annual professional development opportunities offered to the entire staff. Through regular professional evaluation, teachers develop their own professional development plan to both meet the school's stated objectives, and to continually improve in his or her area of instruction.

Staffing Safeguards & Mandatory Reporting

State Board of Education Rules 2227.12

Kurn Hattin School staff members have completed fingerprinting and child/adult registry background checks. Verification forms for each staff member is included in his/her professional file.

Kurn Hattin School has a published mandatory reporting policy in both the staff and family handbooks which complies with 16 V.S.A. § 251-260. The head of school conducts annual training in mandatory reporting during August in-service, prior to the start of school each year.

Health and Safety, Nursing, and Immunization

State Board of Education Rules 2226.7

Kurn Hattin School has formal plans in place for fire, active shooter and shelter in place drills which are held monthly. All staff receive training in First Aid and CPR. There are identified staff responsible for administering the full range of emergency services. Kurn Hattin Homes employs three full-time nurses.

Student health information is included in each student's official file, including parent/family medical emergency release forms and current student immunization records. All student files are locked in a secure cabinet in the head of school's office and included in secure digitized student filing system.

Hazing, Harassment & Bullying Policies

At the time of review, the Agency's Independent School Team members confirmed that Kurn Hattin School has adopted the Agency of Education's policies and protocols for hazing, harassment, and bullying. The policy is included in staff and family handbooks and posted on its website. Each policy is reviewed during staff in-service training in August prior to the start of school.

Facilities

State Board of Education Rule 2226.6(3)

Kurn Hattin School building is located on a two-hundred and eighty acre, well managed campus in Westminster. Buildings throughout the program are well maintained and offer visitors and families with warm greeting throughout the facility. Student art marks the entrances of the school building. The building is scrupulously clean, well-organized, and welcoming. Included in the school building is the main office, a cafeteria for meal preparation and nutrition classes, classrooms, a conference room, art area and a sizable school library. There is also a large music/performance space and a gymnasium. Buildings on campus are secured through a locked system that can only be accessed by using either an official staff badge, or via an administrative staff member tasked with tracking visitor appointments.

Emergency exit posters and maps are prominently displayed, at appropriate height by grade level, to ensure students can read and understand graphic instructions. The school building is hardwired for a fire alarm wet system, which is inspected annually. The HVAC/air exchange system is inspected annually also and is in good working order. A Certificate of Occupancy (CO) is on file at the Agency of Education.

Financial Capacity:

State Board of Education Rule 2226.9

Kurn Hattin School's administration submitted financial information with the application, which was prepared by an outside financial agency. An independent audit report for FY20 and FY21, confirms that Kurn Hattin School has the financial means to meet its stated program objectives throughout the period of approval.

Recommendation:

Kurn Hattin School meets the criteria for renewal of approval except for Rule 2227, which applies to an independent school that operates a boarding program, enrolls students as boarding students, or operates a residential treatment program. As a school with a boarding program, Kurn Hattin is required to be accredited by a State Board recognized accreditor; or licensed as a residential childcare facility by the Department for Children and Families (DCF). Kurn Hattin School has not received accreditation and is not licensed by DCF. Accordingly, the Agency of Education cannot recommend renewal of approval due to noncompliance with Rule 2227 at this time.

Point-in-Time Site Review Addendum

Independent School Post-Review Program Update

On April 8, 2023, the Agency of Education received confirmation of Kurn Hattin's initial accreditation through the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. As a school with a boarding program, Kurn Hattin is required to be accredited by a State Board of Education recognized accreditor or licensed as a resident childcare facility by DCF.

Agency of Education Response & Update

Due to being granted NEASC accreditation, the Independent School Team can now recommend a five-year renewal of Kurn Hattin School to the Secretary of Education. The school's academic program, staff, facilities, and financial standing all meet State Board of Education rule requirements under 2227.