

Site Review

Renewal– Red Fox Community School

Independent School Review Report General Education

Site Review Conducted - May 12, 2022

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

The Red Fox Community School (RFCS) submitted its renewal application in a timely manner meeting State Board of Education renewal requirements under 2227.

General Education

State Board of Education Rule 2226.2

Members of the Agency of Education's Independent School team met with Red Fox Community School's staff on May 12, 2022. Interviews were conducted at the school which is located at 1045 Kirby Hollow Road in Dorset, VT. School staff present for interviews were the head of school, two content area instructors, and an elementary education instructor.

School Philosophy

Red Fox Community School is focused on providing a student centered progressive academic experience for students from kindergarten through fourth grade. The school's education philosophy is posted on its website. The philosophy describes the school's commitment to "educat[ing] students through a progressive approach to be independent thinkers, creative problem solvers, and engaged, respectful community members. At Red Fox Community School, we are first and foremost a community of children, families, and educators. We are committed to developing relationships in which all are welcome and encouraged to share their voice and feel respected as integral members of the community. At Red Fox Community School, education is an opportunity for bringing meaningful change to the world around us. Through shared authentic experiences, emphasis on the learning process, and the building of meaningful connections with the outside world, we envision our students to be empowered stewards of intellectual freedom, community mindedness, and of the natural world around them."

Program Objectives

The school's academic objectives align with its mission and vision statements. Methods for delivery of academic learning and social development includes a specific set of core values:

- **Social & Emotional Development** An understanding that social and emotional development and growth is at the heart of learning. Life demands of us the ability to cooperate, work together, compromise, be effective communicators, and respect a multitude of viewpoints.
- **Low Student/Teacher Ratio** A low student to teacher ratio allows classroom experiences to be tailored to meet the needs of both the individual learners and the greater classroom community.
- **Multiple Areas of Study** A rigorous, integrated curriculum that incorporates learning in the following areas: literacy, math, social studies, science, art, music, physical education, foreign language, fiber arts, carpentry, and outdoor living skills.

- **Learning Groups Proficiency** and interest-based groupings for reading, writing, and math instruction.
- **Traditions** a recognition of the importance of building whole school traditions.
- **Community Minded** A relationship with and understanding of the people and places of the greater community; a deep understanding of the natural world around us.
- **Social Justice** A commitment to social justice and to making our community a better place in meaningful, age-appropriate ways.
- **Teamwork** Partnerships with all Red Fox School Community members developed through daily conversations, weekly updates, study group centered around progressive education, and invitations to help with school-wide community social and other events.
- **Comfortable Environment** An environment that fosters and supports self-confidence, integrity, compassion, creativity, activism, courage, curiosity, happiness, empathy, responsibility, kindness, and ethical citizenship. (Source: Red Fox Community School renewal application and website, FY22)

School Enrollment

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

Agency independent school team members confirmed that Red Fox Community School's enrollment is currently 27 students from kindergarten through fourth grade. There are two pathways for enrollment at RFCS. Students from Sandgate, Stratton, and Winhall may attend RFCS district-funded tuition payment. District-funded tuition payment families from Bennington-Rutland Supervisory Union are required to complete an annual declaration of residency assurance form and a tuition request form prior to the first day of school. Private pay students may be enrolled by parents/guardians by completing an application. The school follows a traditional school year calendar; students are in attendance for a minimum of 175 days.

RFCS's enrollment committee is comprised of the head of Red Fox Community School, members of the school board, and members of the school's instructional staff. Final enrollment decisions are made by the head of school. Admission documents include RFCS's non-discrimination statement: "Red Fox Community School admits students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin. "

Governance

State Board of Education Rule 2226.4

Red Fox Community School's Governance Board is comprised of five community members who serve a three-year term. Board members range in professional expertise from a small business

owner who specializes in finance to professional educators with many years of experience with curriculum and pedagogy.

Governance Board members work closely with the head of school to provide oversight of school finances and academic programming, assist with facilities maintenance, update school policies and procedures and coordinate fund-raising activities. The head of RFCS reports directly to the Board.

Minimum Course of Study & Required Assessments

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

The central tenet of Red Fox Community School's academic program is social emotional learning. Students work in partnerships, small groups, and whole class groups.

During classroom observations, the Agency's independent school team identified evidence that instruction methods supported the school's stated philosophy and academic objectives. Additionally, each class observation demonstrated methods for addressing appropriate multi-grade, differentiated instruction to ensure skill development in each child. Methods of instruction and authentic assessment reflected measurable student progress and aligned with Minimum Course of Study requirements to address the age and ability needs of each student.

Academic groupings are intentionally flexible so that each member of the class experiences working with different peers on various projects. Classroom teachers model communication norms encouraging students to use kind, clear, and respectful language when solving problems and working collaboratively with their peers. Staff communicated that program development integrates learning opportunities to help students learn to recognize each other as "teachers in our morning meetings and in all curricular and social areas. Children function as stewards of their classroom, school, and community. As classroom community members, students each have their own cleaning and organization job [to] instill a sense of pride and ownership of their classroom."

RFCS curriculum links all early education lessons and elementary content learning by focusing on essential elements and basic concepts from kindergarten through fourth grade. The English Language Arts instructor stated that RFCS has developed specific literacy questions for each grade: "What does it look like to be an active reader? How do we effectively communicate in writing and speaking? What do stories reveal about humanity, community, and place? How do we tell engaging and meaningful stories?" Additionally, literacy teachers take students both to the Manchester Community Library and the school library to develop independent reading skills. The social studies curriculum integrates literacy standards using book choice, writing, and storytelling.

Math curriculum and instruction is similarly structured. The same driving questions are used for delivery of student learning in a differentiated and age-appropriate manner. Math curriculum essential questions frame the arc of student learning by encouraging students to

find the answers to what it means to be an effective problem solver, how can shapes be broken into similar parts, how numbers make patterns, and how we can use math to solve everyday problems

Students are also provided with opportunities to attend classes in fine arts, performing arts, cultural studies, music, outdoor education, environmental studies, and student-designed high-interest learning activities. The school follows a traditional calendar and is open for 178 days annually.

Instruction follows several modalities, including in-person small group activities, traditional classroom setting, in-person individualized project-based learning, one-on-one direct instruction, and outdoor education. The head of the RFCS and interested staff collaborated with a local farmer to develop and integrate a farm-to-school internship program. Students engage in supplemental learning activities as part of the social studies and science curriculum as well as practice social emotional learning skills. Core classes are scheduled for 45 minutes daily by the instructors with time each afternoon for community-based, individualized student academic exploration, and project-based learning activities.

Peer interactions were respectful while students engaged in problem solving. Students assigned work group responsibilities among themselves in an equitable manner. Teachers engaged each student group effectively and provided needed instruction based upon each group's learning needs. School choice students participate in state assessments annually and are conducted collaboratively between RFCS and LEAs.

Four days a year, Red Fox Community School offers a "community Saturday school" in the form of Family Campout, Fall Harvest Festival, Family Snow Day, and Spring Festival. The head of school described these four days as having "intrinsic value... [and] each day is designed to allow parents to experience some of our school's values, mission and academic design through community activities."

Professional Staff

State Board of Education Rule 2226.8.1

All Red Fox Community School's instructional staff are qualified to teach in their area of specialty. The head of school conducts formal regular classroom observations that inform annual professional development planning.

Teachers take an active role in developing the school's curriculum and incorporate appropriate transitions between grades K- 4. Curriculum development includes integration of outdoor exploration and time at the farm. Teachers collaborate regularly to ensure that student learning is consistent and developmentally appropriate, including authentic assessment strategies.

Staffing Safeguards & Mandatory Reporting

State Board of Education Rules 2227.12

The Agency's Independent School team confirmed that all Red Fox Community School staff have completed fingerprinting and child/adult abuse registry background checks. Verification forms for each staff member is included in their official file. Parent volunteers and community volunteers have also undergone fingerprint and abuse registry background checks.

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

Health and Safety, Nursing, and Immunization

State Board of Education Rules 2226.7

Red Fox Community School has formal plans in place for monthly fire drills. The head of school, instructors, and Board members are currently engaged in developing active shooter and shelter-in-place policies to minimize younger student anxiety.

All staff receive annual training in First Aid and CPR. Medical equipment and first aid kits are easily accessed throughout the buildings. The fire alarm system is hardwired throughout both school buildings. Emergency exit posters and maps are prominently displayed and include easy to read and understand graphic instructions.

Red Fox Community School does not employ a school nurse and does not administer any student medications. The head of school reported that a nurse was assigned to the school by Vermont Health Department throughout the pandemic. The support was most effective for managing COVID-related requirements, mitigation and sanitation and obtaining important health information such as vaccination clinics for staff.

Student health information is included in student files 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, agency personnel confirmed that Red Fox Community School has adopted the Agency of Education's policies and procedures for hazing, harassment, and bullying. The policy is included in the staff and family handbooks.

Facilities

State Board of Education Rule 2226.6(3)

Red Fox Community School is housed in a renovated log cabin on five acres. In accordance with ADA requirements, the first floor is ADA-compliant, including the bathroom, although the second floor is not fully accessible. In the summer of 2021, student enrollment and health

pressures caused by COVID required the installation of an additional one level classroom facility which is adjacent to the main building. Access to the new classroom building is ADA-compliant.

Both buildings are clean, well-organized, and welcoming. On the first floor of the main building is a kitchen for meal preparation and nutrition classes, a classroom, a conference room, and storage for materials.

Financial Capacity:

State Board of Education Rule 2226.9

Red Fox Community School submitted a copy of its annual audit report and profit and loss statement confirming the school has met rule 2226.11 requirements and has the financial capacity to carry out its educational purposes for the period of approval.

Renewal Approval Recommendation:

The Agency's Independent School team recommends renewal of Red Fox Community School to the Secretary of Education. The school's academic program, facilities, and financial standing all meet State Board of Education's requirements to operate as an independent school. The independent school team recommends a renewal of five years.