

Site Review

Initial Approval – United Christian Academy

**Independent School - Initial Approval
General Education**

Site Review Conducted - June 2, 2022

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

United Christian Academy submitted an application seeking initial approval in accordance with State Board of Education requirements under 2226.

General Education

State Board of Education Rule 2226.2

Members of the agency's Independent School team met with United Christian Academy staff on, June 2, 2022. Interviews were conducted at the school, which is located at 65 School Street Newport, VT. School staff present for interviews were the head of school, the education program director/ELA instructor, three content area instructors and an elementary education instructor.

School Philosophy

United Christian Academy (UCA) is focused on providing a Christ-centered education to students K - 12 from the Northeast Kingdom. An excerpt from UCA's website states that "Our unity lies in requiring all families to be open to the Christian faith and desiring all students to come to a personal faith in Jesus Christ. As our name states, United Christian Academy is truly united in its effort to honor and glorify the Lord together as both Catholic and Protestant believers."

Program Objectives

The school's specific academic objectives align with its mission statement. Methods for delivery of academic learning and social development include a specific set of core values for students "...who want to be challenged by high academic and moral standards, including a commitment to community service. We strive to partner with families and to have them be active participants in all aspects of our school [and to] bring about a sense of belonging in the educational process."

School Enrollment

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

United Christian Academy has a three-step admissions process which requires families to schedule a visit to the school, participate in an interview with the head of school and complete an enrollment application. Final enrollment decisions are made by the head of school and education program director. Agency Independent School team members confirmed that during the 2021-2022 school year, sixty-six students were enrolled from kindergarten through grade twelve. The school follows a traditional 175 – 179 school year calendar and students attend core and elective classes, Monday through Friday.

The school's student/family handbook includes information about admissions as "purpose-driven enrollment [as a] framework by which all admissions decisions are made."

UCA's admission's framework includes the following:

- the school's enrollment mission is to engage in a two-fold process of both "reaching those who have not heard the Gospel and teaching believers."
- UCA's focus is "Biblical and family values oriented." UCA "will seek to bolster the work of the family, support the Bible's teaching on sanctity of scriptural marriage, and emphasize traditional values.
- Academic excellence is always the primary goal.
- Servant leadership which supports the school's mission for "producing the next generation of Christian leaders who choose character before career, wisdom beyond scholarship, service before self and participation as a way of life."

The admissions section of UCA's handbook includes a statement that describes the principles employed by the school in making final admissions decisions as "UCA reserves the right to admit students and families on the basis of academic performance, religious commitment, lifestyle choices, and personal qualifications; including a willingness to cooperate with UCA leadership and abide by its values and policies."

Students and families must also submit with the completed application, student health records, school transcripts and behavioral records from previously attended public or private schools. Documentation regarding any tuition arrangements developed between families and UCA's financial officer must also be submitted as part of the application process.

Governance

State Board of Education Rule 2226.4

United Christian Academy's organizational structure is facilitated by a seven-member Board of Directors responsible for addressing UCA's vision and legacy. Board members also provide specialized oversight as members of one of the school's working committees. Specialized work groups include an executive committee responsible for developing and conducting oversight of the school's mission and strategic planning. Board members also serve on a finance committee and a leadership team to steer action and implementation of educational services. Finally, a Pastoral and Advisory Council comprised of representatives from both Protestant and Catholic organizations are charged with guidance and providing support services for the entire school program.

Day-to-day management of United Christian Academy is the responsibility of the head of school, education program director and a finance coordinator.

Minimum Course of Study

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

United Christian Academy's published academic description states that "Christian education is the intentional effort of teachers through instructional relationship with students" to increase students' experiences and knowledge of God. The ultimate purpose of a Christian education is for students to learn who God is, to develop a personal relationship with Him as Creator and Redeemer and to be fully prepared to positively contribute to their community at large."

UCA emphasizes the importance of education as the gateway to the future success of all students and the school administrators believe that “Education at UCA equips students for success throughout their lives, both academically and spiritually. Within a student-centered education, students are looked at as individuals. One educational path that is the best for one student may not be the best for another. At UCA, we offer various paths to success. Students learn best when they are engaged with and have ownership over their learning.”

Agency of Education interviews with the education program director confirmed that secular curriculum and lesson plan development is utilized when it offers a more effective learning method than curriculum offered by Christian textbook publishers.

Instruction is academically appropriate for each grade, K – 12; however, instructors emphasize and model for students the importance of striving for academic excellence regardless of student ability. UCA’s curriculum is differentiated to meet the needs of students requiring additional supports in core areas as well as providing academic enrichment for gifted and talented students in need of additional learning opportunities. Higher level thinking is required in all curriculum development and in daily lesson plan development. Instructors model for student’s classroom expectations and stress for their students thoughtful, higher-level thinking and engagement with peers, regardless of grade level.

United Christian Academy refers to its elementary and middle school programs as the “lower school.” The curriculum is designed to support the school's mission to nurture children in becoming strong in faith, character, and academics.” The high school program or “upper school” seeks to challenge students to grow intellectually, physically, and spiritually so they will stand firm in the world they will face. We provide a comprehensive college prep curriculum that enables each student to discover and to develop his or her God-given talents.”

UCA adheres to a traditional grade point/ABC grading scale. United Christian Academy’s assessment practice allows students to review academic mastery over a topic or concept. Various curricula used for the subjects being taught includes:

- Grades K-5 utilize Abeka, Association of Christian School International (ACSI), Bob Jones, and Purposeful Design.
- Middle and high school grades utilize All about Algebra, Bob Jones, Prentiss Hall, and Cambridge Physics Outlet (CPO) Science.

Eligible high school students may take advance of dual enrollment opportunities through Liberty University and North Star Academy. The English Language Arts curriculum for grades K – 12 is Shurley Grammar and Wordly Wise.

During classroom observations, the agency’s Independent School team members confirmed 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 for the lower program and middle-school age classes, as needed, to ensure skill and cognitive development of each child. Methods of instruction and

authentic assessments were reflective of measurable student progress in both the lower and upper school programs.

Peer interactions were observed to be respectful and enthusiastic during class instruction. Methods of instruction for upper school students (grades 9– 12) and middle school students (grades 5 – 8) were conducted primarily through direct instruction with an inquiry-based question-and-answer session. Elementary or lower school instruction is delivered using traditional elementary education methods with emphasis on student centered learning. Academic assessments utilize traditional grading methods and report cards are provided to families each academic quarter. Students and families have access to an on-line grade book throughout the school year and instructors update student grades weekly.

Mid-quarter academic progress reports are sent to families and if students require additional supports, include plans to address each student’s academic needs. Parent teacher conferences are held regularly, generally after the first and third quarter.

Mastery of grade level skills and knowledge are emphasized by all instructors for each grade level, K – 12. Students “will [not] be advanced to the next grade unless ready.” United Christian Academy’s academic benchmarks define both lower and upper school grade retention policies. Lower (elementary – middle school) students with grades below 70 percent mastery level require teachers, parents and academic program director schedule a meeting to determine if a child can be advanced to the next grade.

UCA contacts parents of upper school students (grades 9 – 12) who are identified as “in danger of failing.” A meeting is scheduled to review student academic progress. Those in attendance include family members, instructors, and the school’s academic program director. Students who do not complete class requirements do not receive credit toward high school graduation. However, UCA works with students in danger of failing and family members to develop individualized academic plans to ensure work completion as well as maintain opportunities to earn credits toward high school graduation.

Professional Staff

State Board of Education Rule 2226.8.1

All teachers employed by United Christian Academy must abide by a ministry of teaching policy included in both staff and student/family handbooks. Instructors are “obligated to assist his or her students in understanding not only” specific core instruction, but “how the order and discipline” of a unit of study reveals the mind of God. For example, UCA’s teaching ministry “obligates” a geography teacher to imbed in content area learning that God created the mountains, the sea, the rivers the deserts, the forests, the plains and all the creatures that inhabit them.”

Teachers take an active role in developing the school’s curriculum and incorporate appropriate transitions between grades, K- 12. Curriculum development is the product of a collaborative effort between instructors and the academic program director. Formal classroom observations and review of lesson plans are conducted weekly. 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 individualized development plan.

The lower school, or elementary school instructors, hold bachelor's degrees in social work, elementary education and one teacher holds a Vermont teacher's license in English.

Upper school staff members are all qualified to teach in their areas of specialty, most have earned college degrees in their content areas as well as master's degrees in curriculum development and instruction.

Staffing Safeguards & Mandatory Reporting

State Board of Education Rules 2227.12

The agency's Independent School team confirmed that all United Christian Academy staff have completed fingerprinting and child/adult abuse registry background checks. Verification forms for each staff member is included in an official file. Parent volunteers and community volunteers have also undergone fingerprint and abuse registry background checks.

UCA 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

United Christian Academy has formal plans in place for fire drills, which are held monthly. 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 building. Emergency exit posters and maps are prominently displayed, at appropriate heights, by grade level, to ensure students can read and understand graphic instructions. UCA does not employ a school nurse and does not administer any student medications.

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 United Christian Academy has adopted the Agency of Education's policies and protocols for hazing, harassment, and bullying. The policy is included in staff and family handbooks.

Facilities

State Board of Education Rule 2226.6(3)

UCA's school building is in a renovated, handicap accessible brick building. The first floor is ADA accessible as well as the first-floor bathroom.

The building is clean, well-organized, and welcoming. The main floor includes a main office, the kitchen for meal preparation and nutrition classes, classrooms, a conference room, library, cafeteria/gymnasium, a room for music instruction, and storage for materials. The second floor includes classrooms, study space for students, and a library for upper school students.

The basement level contains lower school faculty space, lower school classrooms, bathrooms, activity spaces, and storage for elementary education materials.

Financial Capacity:

State Board of Education Rule 2226.9

United Christian Academy submitted a copy of an annual 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.

Initial Approval Recommendation:

The agency's Independent School team recommends initial approval for United Christian Academy to the Secretary of Education. The school's academic program, facilities and financial standing all meet State Board of Education requirements to operate as a general education independent school for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. The independent school team recommends the maximum initial approval period of two years.