

AGENCY OF EDUCATION

Barre, Vermont

**TEAM:** School Finance

**ITEM:** Will the State Board of Education grant renewal of general independent school approval, to serve students in grades K-8, to Champlain Valley Christian School, Vergennes, VT?

**SECRETARY'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

**That the State Board of Education grants renewal of general independent school approval, to serve students in grades K-8, to Champlain Valley Christian School, Vergennes, VT. This approval is for five years, through June 30, 2022.**

**Approval is subject to the condition that the school immediately reports to the Agency of Education whenever any changes occur in enrollment, programs, policies, facilities, financial capacity, staffing, or administration during the approval period.**

**STATUTORY AUTHORITY:** 16 V.S.A. § 166 (b)

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

1. The Champlain Valley Christian School (CVCS) is an approved Vermont independent day school with a purpose of providing education for their students spiritually, academically, socially and physically. All teachings are done with the goal of nurturing within each student the moral and spiritual qualities constituting Christian character. The school has four primary objectives and in general the goal of providing students with the tools of learning and communication so that they are able to think clearly, logically, creatively and independently. Both the school statement of purpose and the educational objectives are stated in detail in the CVCS application. The school is accredited by Christian Schools International (CSI). The school was founded in 1974 to meet the needs of the Christian community. The mission of the school is stated clearly on their website. The school is a coeducational facility and currently has 51 students in grades K-8.
2. A Board of Directors in conjunction with the School Society, the school administrator and the faculty and staff, conducts the school governance. The principal is responsible for the administration and management of the school facilities.
3. **Daily Program:**  
The daily program includes all the subjects and special classes one would expect in a school setting including but not limited to basic communication skills including reading and writing; mathematics; physical education and health; English, American and other

literature; Science; Fine and Performing Arts; Citizenship and History, and Religious/Biblical Studies. Students who are eligible for Title I services within the school receive additional support. Students who need enrichment are offered additional opportunities.

#### **4. School Site Visit**

Steve Lorenz visited the school on behalf of the Secretary of Education on May 15, 2016. Mr. Lorenz was greeted by the office manager and the school's administrator; and then was able to join the staff and student body in their opening meeting and prayers. The administrator and Mr. Lorenz met to review policies, handbooks, paperwork and to review the AOE checklist. Following that meeting, Mr. Lorenz was given a tour of the facilities. The remainder of the day consisted of visiting and observing each of the classes K-8 and then meeting/interviewing teachers. The day concluded with a final check in with the school administrator. The schedule allowed Mr. Lorenz to get a full sense of the rhythms of the school day and to experience how the school did in fact provide academic, social, spiritual and physical growth as guided by the school's mission, purpose and educational objectives.

#### **5. Description of Facilities**

The Champlain Valley Christian School moved into their new facility in August 2008. This modern building, which is handicapped accessible, includes eight classrooms, a library/computer lab, a community room with kitchen, administrative offices and bathrooms all located on a beautiful parcel of land located on the outskirts of Vergennes Village. The building is well maintained. The facility is more than adequate to meet the needs of the students and meets state and federal health and safety regulations. A copy of the Certificate of Occupancy (CO) issued by the Division of Fire Safety is on file at the school.

#### **6. Minimum Course of Study 16 V.S.A. §906.**

The minimum course of study, as prescribed in 16. V.S.A § 906, is provided and documented in the CVCS application and well adapted to the age and abilities of the students. CVCS uses the Vermont Common Core State Standards (CCSS) to guide its selection and use of curriculum K-8. CVCS has small class sizes, which allow the teachers to work with students on an individual basis and in small homogeneous and heterogeneous groups. In addition CVCS uses peer coaching, research skills, whole class guided teaching, cooperative learning, textbook readings, hands on projects, multi-media presentations, case studies, field trips and more to meet the needs of all students. Recognizing different learning styles and using multiple intelligence theory CVCS teachers adapt their methods and curriculum to reflect the differences in students' ages and abilities.

#### **7. Staffing: Adequacy; Qualifications; Professional Development**

The number of staff and faculty at CVCS numbers nine full- and part-time faculty with a number of support staff including but not limited to the office manager, custodian, etc.

Mr. Lorenz's observations and interviews indicated a high level of skill, knowledge and practice of the school's statement of purpose, understanding of the curriculum, a collaborative spirit, and respect for individual learning styles of each of the students at the school. All stakeholders I talked with knew the mission, the core values and educational objectives of the school. Many of the classroom teachers and staff have been working together for several years, which has made for a collegial and cohesive group of educational professionals. All teaching faculty at CVCS are required to have and maintain their Vermont Educator Licenses and all have college/university degrees. Professional development needs are determined by personal statement of need, observations by the administrator, reviewing student achievement, and new curriculum requirements. In-service trainings are not only for reviewing school policies and procedures but also for curriculum and professional development.

**8. Financial Stability and Capacity**

CVCS placed in its application and had on site a signed and notarized letter dated February 7, 2017 from Gerrit Gosliga, President of the CVCS School Board that the school was in good financial standing. In addition, attached to the letter, were financial reports for 2015-2016 and year to date 2017. The school is solvent and has the financial resources available to operate.

**9. Student Attendance and Assessment Records. Fire Drill and Safety Records.**

These records were reviewed and found to be in very good order.

**10. Operating Schedule; Number of Instructional Hours.**

The school maintains an operating schedule that includes a total number of instructional hours each year of 1110.5 hours and schools days of 175 per year.

**11. Policies: Admission, Health and Safety, Discipline, Harassment/Bullying.**

Review of the school's handbook and emergency and safety procedures reveal that the school has developed policies for health and safety, admission, discipline and more. The school has a policy on prevention and reporting of harassment, hazing, and bullying that is as stringent as the Agency's model policy, mandatory reporting of child abuse (as well as training) and all other policies required and desired to operate a school efficiently, effectively and safely.

**12. School Improvement Plans:**

No plans for physical plant improvements were shared with the reviewer or were indicated in the report. There have been, in the past, discussions about a fundraising campaign to add athletic fields and more playground space.

### **Summary and Recommendation**

The Champlain Valley Christian School provided a complete and detailed renewal application. The site visit was set up to be a comprehensive look at all five K-8 classrooms while they were in session. Meeting with faculty and the lead administrator was helpful in getting a sense of the inner workings and strengths of the school and the school's alignment with Vermont SBE guidelines for independent schools. Mr. Lorenz was very impressed with the social mission of the school and friendliness and politeness of the student body. There was a real evidence of a "community of purpose" throughout the school.

**FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:** None

**STAFF AVAILABLE:** Cassandra Ryan, Finance Analyst, 802-479-8545