

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 Orchard Valley Waldorf School, East Montpelier, 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 Orchard Valley Waldorf School, East Montpelier, VT. This approval is for five years through June 30, 2022.

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

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

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

1. The Orchard Valley Waldorf School (referred to in the rest of the report as OVWS) is a K-8 day school, with a separate early childhood program, serving boys and girls. The maximum number in a grade is 18 children with an average teacher/student ratio of 1:12. OVWS is an independent school founded in 2004, and built upon the commitment of a passionate group of families to expand Waldorf education in Central Vermont. The school has grown since its founding and now serves preschool through grade eight, with summer and aftercare programs available. More than 150 students are enrolled in all programs, with 92 students in grades K-8, served by 40 full-time and part-time faculty and staff at two beautiful campuses--the main campus, known as "Grace Farm" in East Montpelier, and the Child's Garden in Montpelier. OVWS is a member of the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (AWSNA). The school is managed with a team approach with Kathy Seaver Clark as the Director of Operations.

2. School Site Visit

On behalf of the Secretary of Education, Steve Lorenz conducted an onsite visit on May 11, 2017. The schedule for the day included a tour of the school followed by observations in a grade 2/3 classroom and an 8th grade classroom. Mr. Lorenz then had the opportunity to meet with the 4th grade teacher and Pedagogical Chair, the Office Manager, and some other teachers casually. Mr. Lorenz's day continued with observation of a grade 6/7 French class, who were making a French dish, and then observation of a Handwork class. After that, Mr. Lorenz was able to meet for an extended time with the Director of Operations to review the policies, procedures and

other paperwork as well as to talk about the school in general. The visit closed after meeting with two more teachers, who were also parents.

The visit confirmed the dedication of staff and teachers to “awakening the highest potential in every child” and “receiving the children in reverence; educating them in love; letting them go forth in freedom.” In each and every classroom and student and teacher/staff encounters I had it was obvious that cultivating and stewarding a love of learning was of paramount priority. It was equally as obvious that the programs and curriculum, and how they are delivered is designed to educate the whole child. OVWS strives and succeeds to honor the natural stages of child development by equally engaging the mind, enlivening the imagination and strengthening the will of its students.

3. Description of Facilities

Orchard Valley Waldorf School is located on a 55-acre property of open fields and forest. The property consists of a number of buildings that house the main school, a yurt style building for the 8th graders and separate buildings for the early childhood program, and the administrative building with a useable basement space. There also is a campus in Montpelier for more early childhood programming. The main building was renovated in 2016. The facility is adequate to meet the needs of the students, and the building meets all state and federal health and safety regulations. A copy of the Certificate of Occupancy (CO) issued by the Division of Fire Safety was viewed onsite.

4. Minimum Course of Study 16 V.S.A. §906.

A minimum course of study of learning experiences adapted to a pupil’s age and ability in the field of basic communications skills, etc. was evident and is approached in a unique way at OVWS as a Waldorf School. Submitted with the application is a very detailed description of the OVWS’ curriculum in each of the disciplines. In general, the curriculum covers Basic Communication Skills (writing and reading); Arithmetic; Citizenship/History; Physical Education and Health; English/Literature; Visual and Performing Arts; Handwork and French. Additional services include educational support and Title I, a Care Group and Social Harmony Committee.

5. Staffing: Adequacy; Qualifications; Professional Development

The number of administrative and teaching staff is adequate to deliver a quality school program. The staff and faculty resumes were available during the visit and indicated that all administrators and teaching staff had Bachelor’s or Master’s Degrees combined with many valuable life experiences and deep training in the programs associated with the Waldorf philosophy. My observations and interviews indicated a high level of expertise, passion and collegiality. All stakeholders Mr. Lorenz talked with knew the mission, the core values and educational objectives of the school. All job descriptions were available.

Professional/Personal Development opportunities were encouraged with expectations that teachers and staff keep learning and improving their skill sets. This in turn will

allow them to continue being successful working with students and the administration of the school. The faculty and staff are encouraged to further their study and there are funds to assist with the costs associated with professional development, training, courses and conferences.

Teachers and staff are encouraged to complete five days of curriculum-specific summer training. In addition, teachers are recommended to seek at least two days of professional development per year.

6. Financial Capacity

Available to the reviewer on site and in the application was a notarized letter summarizing the financial status for the prior fiscal year signed by the Board of Directors and the current Profit and Loss Statement as well as the current Balance Sheet. The reviewer was satisfied with the evidence of financial capacity presented.

7. Student Attendance and Assessment Records. Fire Drill and Safety Records.

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

8. Operating Schedule; Number of Instructional Hours.

The school maintains an operating schedule that includes a total number of instructional hours of 1,089 hours and 165 days each year.

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

Review of the school's handbooks and teacher and staff interviews reveals 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 and based on the same.

10. School Improvement Plans.

OVWS has recently had a major renovation to the main building in 2016. There were no further renovations revealed during the visit or on the application.

11. Summary and Recommendation

This reviewer was impressed with the dedication, expertise and professionalism of the staff and faculty. The school is forward thinking in supporting an early childhood campus in Montpelier; their new program, The Forest Kindergarten; and in general, striving for excellence and staying true to their mission make for a bright future.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS: None

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